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XVI.

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BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

VOL. I.

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HIS GREAT REVENGE.

PART I.

JACK O' THE CLIFFS.

I.

IT was two o'clock in the morning towards the close of September, and in the clear autumnal moonlight a pretty modern château stood out in bold relief against the dark greenery of a large wood of beech-trees in the depths of the valley of Chevreuse. A poet, gazing upon a scene so calm and fair, would have indulged in peaceful dreams. This charming little château, half hidden in this enchanting nook, seemed as if it could only shelter people accustomed to wealth and happiness. Yet, strange to say, lights flitted rapidly past the first-floor windows. A noise of hurried footsteps and a ringing of bells could be distinctly heard, for the main entrance was open. Presently, three or four terrified-looking persons appeared on the threshold, and darted to the stables which stood on one side of the courtyard.

"They are poisoned!" exclaimed one of these individuals.

"It must be the mushrooms!" said another.

"Joseph, harness the mare to the dog-cart! Hasten to Dr. Brias's at Versailles and bring him here before daybreak, even if you have to cripple the mare!"

"And Monsieur Jules who has gone back to Paris; we must also let him know what has happened."

These incoherent remarks, exchanged in the darkness, plainly proved that death had entered this delightful abode. In fact, a terrible, yet commonplace misfortune had befallen a household dear to many. The genial master of the château, M. de Mathis, a rich creole from Mauritius, who had been living for several years in France, had come to pass the summer at Chevreuse, and had just given an entertainment to a few intimate friends. It had been a question of keeping a family anniversary, and also of announcing the approaching marriage of a young girl distantly related to Madame de Mathis, and at the same time her god-daughter. Her affianced lover, a distinguished officer, had been invited; and, early in the day, an excursion had been planned to the pleasant forest called the Buisson de Verrières. The whole party had pic-niced there, upon the grass, and after the meal, M. de Mathis's nephew, a gay and elegant-looking

young man, who led a somewhat irregular life in Paris, had proposed that they should all ramble through the woods to look for mushrooms.

The proposal was eagerly accepted, especially by the young ladies of the party. The older persons, who thought of the risk which might be incurred in eating the mushrooms, determined to examine them when gathered. However, parties were formed, and the young people started on their search. An hour later, they returned to an appointed meeting-place, displaying a wonderful collection of mushrooms to M. and Madame de Mathis. They all asserted that they had only plucked harmless fungi, and offered to prove it by eating them; but M. de Mathis selected his nephew, Jules Noridet, to examine the lot. It was he who had suggested the search in the first place, and he was considered by the whole family to be a first-rate connoisseur of this favourite esculent. In fact, while sorting the mushrooms which had been gathered, he explained their various characteristics so clearly, that he might have passed for a professor of natural history.

The party returned to the château, where the dinner was extremely lively. Jules Noridet insisted on preparing and serving the mushrooms in person. Everyone tasted them, and they were unanimously declared delicious. The evening ended with a carpet dance, by which the affianced couple profited to exchange some tender words. So much did all the young people enjoy themselves, that it was at last necessary for Madame de Mathis to let them know that it was midnight; an unreasonably late hour for the country. The party then separated. The older persons remained at the château for the night, but Mademoiselle Andrée's intended husband, M. Gontran de Kergas, returned to Paris with Jules Noridet, in the latter's brongham; M. de Mathis's nephew seeming anxious not to miss a card-party at his club that night.

He repaired there after driving his companion home, played like a madman, won a couple of hundred louis, and returned home at two in the morning, telling the members from whom he had won this money that he felt very poorly; an assertion which was not altogether believed.

In reality, however, he was somewhat ill, and a physician whom his valet fetched detected symptoms of poisoning, and at once prescribed energetic remedies. In the meanwhile, Jules, like a devoted and faithful nephew, dispatched his coachman to Chevreuse to let his uncle know of his illness, and bring him news from the château. After a couple of hours, the patient seemed better, and evinced a strong desire to sleep, whereupon the doctor departed quite reassured, and Jules dismissed his servant.

It was nearly noon on the next day, and Noridet had not yet rung his bell, when a stranger called at his rooms, and insisted upon seeing him at once. The valet did not dare to resist this persistent stranger, and went to consult his master, who doubtless thought that the person was a messenger with news from Chevreuse, for he gave orders to have him admitted to his bedroom. The new comer was a man of about forty, with an open and intelligent countenance, and easy, elegant manners. In fact, his stylish appearance and look of distinction, had contributed even more than his persistence, to induce the servant to inform his master of the visit. Whilst extremely well dressed, the stranger moreover had the easy bearing of a young man, and his age was only apparent by a few grey hairs about his temples. His forehead was wide and high; his teeth very white, and his lips well formed. His eyes, however, were calculated to inspire one with strange uneasiness. Overhung by heavy brows, these eyes, of an

iron-grey tint, gazed at one with annoying fixity, and when they lighted upon Jules Noridet, the latter experienced a singular sensation. It was as though a sharp blade had touched his heart.

"To whom have I the honour of speaking?" asked Jules, with forced politeness.

"My name is Ladislas Lugos," was the visitor's quiet reply.

"And to what am I to attribute a visit which your name does not explain?" added Jules in a still colder manner.

"Alas, sir, don't you guess?" said the stranger with a look of sadness.

"What! have you brought any bad news? Have you come from—from Chevrense?" exclaimed Noridet, rising up in bed as though he had been moved by a spring.

"Alas, yes!"

"My uncle, I hope, is saved?" asked Jules, with apparent anxiety.

"Your uncle is dead," said the stranger, quietly. "Your aunt will not live through the day, it seems, and—"

"Oh, sir! I beg of you, let me have time to collect myself to try and bear the terrible news you bring!"

"By all means," replied the visitor, with a touch of irony in his tone.

"If you only knew, sir, what kind, what good relatives I am losing—and all on account of an imprudence to which I have nearly fallen a victim myself!"

To these words, articulated in a somewhat whining tone, the stranger replied by a peal of mocking laughter. Jules raised his head and became very pale. "What is the meaning of your laughter, sir?" said he, attempting to speak with haughty calmness.

"It means that I admire your prodigious coolness. I did not come here, however, to inform you of your uncle's death, but to turn it to account."

"I do not understand you."

"You will understand me in a moment, my dear sir. But, first of all, oblige me by dropping that look of affliction and that languid manner. They don't deceive me in the least, as you must see."

"Come to the point, sir," exclaimed Jules, fairly roused, "explain yourself!"

"That will be easily done. You may as well speak in your natural voice, as I know very well that there is nothing whatever the matter with you."

"Your jokes are in very bad taste, sir, and, to put an end to them, I shall call my valet to turn you out," answered Jules, stretching out his arm towards the bell rope.

"I beg your pardon, sir," quietly said the stranger, catching hold of Noridet's wrist before he could ring, "but before summoning your servant it will be as well for you to listen to a few words, which it is important for you to hear."

"What do you mean?" cried M. de Mathis's nephew, livid with anger.

"If you persist in your absurd intention of having me turned out, I warn you that I shall at once go to the imperial prosecutor."

"To the prosecutor! Why, what have you to tell him?" stammered Jules.

"That you are not at all poisoned, Monsieur Noridet, but that you are a poisoner," replied the stranger with perfect coolness.

These words came upon Jules like a clap of thunder. He sank under the weight of his emotion which was like that which roots a criminal to the dock when he hears sentence of death pronounced upon him.

The stranger examined him with his cold, clear eyes, and waited. However, Noridet's silence and prostration did not last for long. A bright flush suddenly came to his cheeks. He rose up in bed and hissed rather than articulated: "You lie, and you shall give me satisfaction for your infamous insult!"

"I am not lying, and as to fighting a duel with you, that is quite impossible, as then, I should have to kill you, and I set store on your precious life."

"This is too much," cried Jules, giving the bell rope a vigorous pull.

The door opened almost immediately, and Noridet's valet appeared. "Your master is feverish," said the stranger, addressing the servant: "be good enough to bring some ice."

While M. Lugos gave this order in the most serious manner imaginable, his grey eyes still remained fixed on Noridet's face. The young fellow made a visible effort to speak, but lacked the strength to say a word, and the servant retired quite convinced that he had received an order from a new physician.

"You were about to commit an irreparable act of folly," said the stranger, with the same coolness as before, "and you will thank me by-and-by for having prevented you from ruining yourself."

Jules now seemed yielding to a strange fascination. He bent his head as if conquered by the magnetic power which blazed from the stranger's grey eyes. His very attitude, moreover, seemed equivalent to a confession.

"I will prove what I have just had the honour of saying to you," resumed M. Lugos with ironical politeness, "and I will endeavour to be clear and precise. I should like to be brief, but I am obliged to begin at the beginning." As he spoke he seated himself at his ease in an arm-chair, which he rolled up to the bedside, and assumed the posture of a man who has a long story to tell.

"You were born on the island of Mauritius on the 27th of October, 1840," he said in a calm and measured voice. "So you will be twenty-seven years old in a month's time. This is the age at which a man's future life is determined."

At this mocking remark, Noridet quivered nervously.

"Your mother, who died at your birth, was the sister of the late Monsieur de Mathis, and your father, Monsieur Jean Noridet did a very large business in—"

"Colonial goods," suddenly added Jules, roused from his prostration by a feeling of vanity.

"As you please," replied the stranger. "I was about to use a more commonplace word. However, the Mathis family, who probably, like me, thought all kinds of commercial traffic to be much the same thing, looked upon this marriage as a *mésalliance*, and Monsieur Noridet hastily left Mauritius as soon as he had realized his profits on the sugar, coffee, and other groceries which he sold to great advantage. He came to live in Paris, but the climate did not agree with him, and when he died of consumption you were still at school. At sixteen you became an orphan with a fortune of more than five hundred thousand francs."

"My father left me a million francs," interrupted Noridet.

"You exaggerate matters, my dear sir,—five hundred and fifty thousand francs at the very most."

"Come, sir," replied Jules, who had recovered some degree of energy,

"you have not come here, I presume, to present me with my guardian's accounts and—"

"Certainly not; they were very carefully made out on the day when you came of age. Monsieur de Mathis, your uncle, was your guardian," added the stranger, still with perfect composure; "but calm yourself, I am coming to the important fact."

"What fact?" asked Noridet in an almost threatening tone.

"The death of your good uncle, sir, which I had the grief of acquainting you with just now."

Jules could not help lowering his eyes under M. Lugos's fixed gaze.

"You were twenty-one years of age, Monsieur Noridet," added the stranger, "when you came into possession of this paltry half million, and you have spent about a hundred thousand francs a year since then. A few hours ago you were, therefore, completely ruined."

"And what business is that of yours?" asked Jules, endeavouring to remain cold and haughty.

"You were ruined yesterday," continued the stranger without replying to this interruption, "but, to day, you are rich again, and very rich, for your uncle, Monsieur de Mathis, has left three millions, and you are his only heir."

"You are mistaken, sir; and if it be really true that my uncle has fallen a victim to the unfortunate accident which has also affected me, there is nothing to prove that I am the inheritor of his fortune, for he may have made a will; he must, indeed, have made one. So you see that your odious supposition is unfounded from the very beginning."

"I do not believe that," replied the stranger, "but you are right upon one point. Your uncle did make a will."

Jules could not help starting. He had been pale before and he now became perfectly ghastly.

"And this will disinherits you," quietly continued M. Lugos.

"That is false!" exclaimed Noridet, heedless of the fact that these words betrayed him.

"I excuse you contradicting me," resumed the stranger, with increasing coldness, "but I declare to you that this will exists. No doubt you thought that there was no will, and that is why you—well, how shall I express it?—Ah! why you *suppressed* Monsieur and Madame de Mathis yesterday."

"You scoundrel!" howled Jules, "don't you know that I myself almost died last night? Where are your proofs?"

"Do not interrupt me if you wish to hear what they are."

"I am waiting to hear you," said Noridet, grinding his teeth with rage.

"I will begin, then, by telling you that your ingenious plan succeeded to perfection. Everybody at the château is convinced that it was the mushrooms that poisoned four or five persons. Some surprise was felt that all the persons who partook of them were not affected; but the doctor from Versailles explained that a single venomous mushroom would suffice to kill any one who eat it. Your uncle, your aunt, and some others undoubtedly had the misfortune to find the poisonous ones in their plates, and thus everything is explained in the most natural manner in the world."

"The proof of it is that I, myself, was more or less grievously poisoned!" said Noridet, in a firmer tone.

"Indeed!" replied the stranger. "I thought that you did not eat any of that rice and curry that was served after the mushrooms."

These simple words, articulated in the indifferent tone of a person reminding another of what they had eaten at some meal shared together, produced a most extraordinary effect upon Noridet. He wished to speak, but could only utter incoherent words, while his hands trembled, and great drops of sweat rolled down his brow.

"Do you know, my dear sir," continued M. Lugos, "that it was all very skilfully planned, and very carefully carried out? You profited wonderfully by the lessons of Aurora, that old negress who brought you up, and who, coming from Madagascar, is expert in the preparation of poisons. Wasn't it Madagascar tanghin that you chose for this delicate operation? I have some little knowledge of tropical plants myself, and I remember that the effect of tanghin is very similar to that of poisonous mushrooms."

Jules Noridet listened with a haggard look.

"I will be brief," resumed the stranger, in a sharper tone. "I saw all, and I know all."

"Saw all?" stammered Noridet.

"Yes, all! I saw you just before dinner throwing some tanghin powder into the curried rice, which you did not partake of. At table I followed your eyes when Monsieur de Mathis tasted the poisoned dish. That was the only moment when you came near betraying yourself." Jules groaned, and his head sunk upon his chest. "I saw something more than this," continued the stranger in a louder tone. "I saw your uncle die. I witnessed his death struggles. They were frightful. He writhed in excruciating agony, and called on you to give you his last blessing. He asked if you were a sufferer, like himself, and wished to send to Paris to know whether you were still alive. His distorted lips still breathed your name at the moment when the death-rattle was heard in his throat, and—do you know, my dear sir, if it be true that the dead return from the other world, I really think that one of these nights your uncle will appear before you?"

The closed curtains and blinds let but a feeble light into the room where the stranger's tragical narrative seemed to conjure up all sorts of terrible visions. Jules Noridet suddenly sat up in bed with his hair standing on end and his arms extended as though to ward off some spectral visitor. Then significant words fell from his lips. "My uncle!" he exclaimed. "It was I who did the deed! Yes, it was I! Mercy, mercy!" And having thus spoken he fell back in frightful convulsions. The stranger looked at him, without attempting to revive him.

"I should not advise you," he said in a frigid tone, "to ever try to brave the questions of an investigating magistrate, for he would easily make you confess everything. I think that you had better settle your affairs with me alone."

"Confess everything?" said Jules, seemingly emerging from a trance.

"Why, I have confessed nothing."

"Well, don't let us lose time in discussing the meaning of words. I have in hand the proof that you poisoned your uncle who has left you three millions of francs. Do you think that this secret enables me to lay down my conditions?"

"What are they?" replied Noridet, in a faint voice. "Do you wish to share the money with me?"

"Your three millions?" replied the stranger scornfully. "What should I do with that money? Why, I am four times as rich as you are."

"What is it you wish, then?"

"I will tell you."

At this moment the servant came in with a large bowl full of ice. "Place that ice upon the night-table," said the stranger in the tone of a physician giving directions, and the valet, having complied, retired, more than ever convinced that his master was being treated by a new doctor.

"Have you ever read 'Hernani?'" asked M. Lugos, as soon as the door was closed.

"'Hernani?'" repeated Noridet, with surprise.

"Yes, Victor Hugo's play."

"I do not understand this joke," said the young fellow, who was gradually recovering his composure and beginning to believe that his visitor was a madman.

"I am not joking in the least, and you will understand me in a moment. There is, in that romantic play, a situation which always seemed to me very striking, and which you cannot, I am sure, have forgotten. Ruy Gomez de Silva saves Hernani's life, but Hernani swears to kill himself whenever the old Castilian nobleman summons him to do so. He thus contracts a debt which he pays in the fifth act. There is a magnificent scene then, the horn sounds in the middle of the night to remind the lovers that the hour has come. The effect is very fine."

Noridet's face wore an expression of uneasiness, but he remained calm.

"Don't you see my idea, my dear sir?" asked the stranger. "Don't you see the striking resemblance between this situation and ours?"

"Not very clearly," replied Noridet, now more than ever convinced that his visitor was crazy.

"It is very apparent, however. I save your life, for I might send you to the guillotine, whereas, I hold my tongue. Well, in exchange for this service, I ask you to make a promise which must be fulfilled at a certain time."

"You mean that you reserve yourself the right to denounce me whenever you have no further need of me. Supposing even that I were guilty, I don't see what I should gain by this agreement."

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir, I don't wish you to come to an agreement. It would be altogether futile. From the present moment you are mine, and I can use my power as I please and when I please. Be at ease on one point, however. The horn will never sound to summon you to hand yourself over to the police. What I have to ask of you is very simple and easy."

"Well, let us drop literary comparisons, sir, and tell me what it is that you do wish," replied Noridet, who had resumed his usual calmness.

"It is this," replied the stranger, quietly: "I need you to play a part in a scheme which is a personal concern of my own, and which it isn't necessary for you to understand. You will act in accordance with my orders without trying to find out my purpose. These orders will always be clear, simple, and limited to certain specified acts, which will never be of a nature to compromise you either in the eyes of the law or of society. You need not change your present mode of life; in fact, you may lead, as formerly, the agreeable life of a rich and fashionable young man. You see that my rule will not be hard to endure."

"As for your orders," said Noridet, ironically, "they will probably be brought me at night by some emissary dressed in red, like the *shirri* of the Venetian 'Council of Ten?'"

"Oh, no! they will come in a much more prosaic manner. I shall have

the honour of calling on you in person, or I shall write to you, and, in the latter case, I will use paper bearing my crest. This will serve you as a guide," added the stranger, holding out a card bearing the name of Lugos surmounted by a crest.

"Ah! very good," replied Noridet, with a sneer. "When I see this fatal crest, I must think of Hernani's horn and obey at once."

M. Lugos bowed gravely.

"Do you really suppose that I shall carry out this pitiable farce?" resumed Jules. "Do you know, sir, that even if I had committed the crime of which you presume to accuse me, I should be very stupid to submit to your rule? I might as well confess myself guilty."

"As regards myself, any confession would be altogether superfluous. I have, as I had the honour to inform you, the most positive proofs in hand, and it depends on me alone to have you arrested this very day," answered the stranger, firmly.

There are tones of voice which carry conviction with them, and Noridet's assurance suddenly disappeared. A long spell of silence followed. Jules's brow was contracted, and he was evidently deep in thought. "Do you want me to tell you," asked M. Lugos, suddenly, "what you are thinking of at the present moment?"

An anxious expression now came over Noridet's face.

"You are thinking that the proofs in my possession will lose their value in time, and you are reflecting whether it won't be best for you to accept my terms for the time being, and shake off the yoke later on, when you think that you can do so with impunity."

The young fellow made a gesture which showed that the stranger had guessed correctly. "You are partly in the right," resumed M. Lugos. "It is always difficult to trace poison when material proof of it has disappeared. Besides, you have studied law, and you know that a criminal action cannot be started when ten years have elapsed after the commission of the crime." Noridet raised his head quickly. "Ten years," resumed M. Lugos with a smile, "that is a long time, but at your age you can resign yourself to waiting. However, to be candid, I must tell you that your calculations are altogether false."

Jules gave the stranger a questioning look. "Yes," said M. Lugos, "I have already told you, I believe, that your uncle has made a will which disinherits you!"

On hearing this, Noridet's brow cleared, and he made a visible effort to conceal a smile. "I was wrong in saying that," added M. Lugos, looking Jules in the eyes, "for, in point of fact, your uncle made *two* wills."

The young man again became frightfully pale.

"By one of these wills, the latest, he left his entire fortune to Madame de Mathis, with instructions to pay you an allowance of twenty-five thousand francs a year. That was very little, and you thought that it would be best for you to destroy this document, which turned an inheritance of three millions into a pitiful pension. You opened your uncle's desk with a false key, and burned the will which made such scanty provision for you. This occurred on September 2, the day after the shooting season began. On the previous evening you pretended that you had sprained your ankle, and you remained alone in the château while the others were scouring the preserves. You see that I know what I am talking about."

Noridet hung his head, and shuddered. He began to believe that this

stranger who told him of his crimes as though he had seen him commit them, really possessed supernatural power.

"Well, my dear sir, in burning that paper, you imprudently deprived yourself of your only certain resource, for Monsieur de Mathis at an earlier date had entirely disinherited you, by a will properly drawn up and authenticated, and which is the only one now valid." M. Lugos paused for a moment as though to give more force to what he had yet to add; and then concluded: "That will is in my hands."

A cry of rage escaped from Noridet's parched throat.

"Let us sum up," resumed the stranger. "You see that if I choose I can take your fortune or your life. Calm yourself, I don't wish for either. I only wish you to obey me, and you will not refuse to do so. But I must warn you that I demand passive and absolute obedience, and that on the first refusal on your part, chastisement will befall you."

"In favour of whom is this other will made?" asked Jules in a hollow tone.

"That is one of my secrets, and you must allow me to keep it as well as the rest."

"What prevents you from ruining me now?" said Noridet bitterly. "Produce the will which disinherits me. When you have reduced me to poverty you will be all the more certain that I shall behave as your slave."

"I don't need that guarantee," replied the stranger, smiling, "and, on the contrary, to serve my purpose you must be rich, and very rich." Noridet seemed lost in deep thought. "To reassure you completely," resumed M. Lugos, in a pleasant tone of voice, "I must tell you that I shall not exact your obedience until you are recognized as your uncle's heir, and have entered into possession of his property. You see that I am frank and liberal in my dealings. Do you accept?"

Having asked this last question with the same invariable calmness, the stranger threw himself back in his arm-chair, and began to draw on his gloves preparatory to departure. Noridet's hurried breathing was distinctly audible. "I accept," he said at last, with an effort. "What are your orders?"

"I have already told you that I have none to give you at present," replied M. Lugos, rising. "You will, for the next few months, be greatly occupied with your duties as a relative and as heir. It is best, however, that you should not neglect your friends. I particularly recommend you to visit Baron Brossin. Your uncle used to see a good deal of him, I believe. The receptions at his house are very agreeable, and his daughter, Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin, is said to be charming. Good morning, sir, I shall see you again, and meanwhile, I hope that your indisposition will have no unpleasant results."

So saying, M. Lugos left the room, bowing to Noridet with perfect politeness.

II.

ON the morning after this strange scene, a number of afflicted friends and sympathizing peasants had assembled on the lawn facing the château in the valley of Chevreuse. They were waiting for the funeral ceremony to take place. The whole neighbourhood was desirous of witnessing the burial of the excellent man who for ten years past had shown the greatest

benevolence towards the poor of the district. All the indigent were there to mark their gratitude. Before expiring, M. de Mathis had expressed a wish to be buried in the humble cemetery of the village, near the old church, which he had had repaired at his own expense, and among the cottages which were indebted to himself for their humble comfort. The worthy villagers were grateful to him for this preference, looking upon it as a final proof of his interest in them, and among those about to follow his remains to the grave, there was not one who felt indifferent to his loss.

Three coffins were ranged side by side under the main entrance which showed dark against the white front of the château. It had been desired that all the victims of the accident should be comprised in the ceremony. Thus a distant female relative and an old family servant who also had died were to be buried at the same time as M. de Mathis. The remains of the poor cousin who had every year met with a cordial welcome at the château, and of the faithful retainer who had devoted his life to the Mathis family, were deposited in coffins similar to that of the rich owner of the estate. Such was their touching equality in death!

The poison had taken serious effect. Out of five persons who had partaken of it, only one was still alive. Madame de Mathis, after suffering horrible agony, appeared to be out of danger, still her violent convulsions had been followed by invincible torpor. She could not move or articulate a word, and Mademoiselle Andrée, who had not left the sick woman's bedside for a moment, now despaired of her reason. It seemed as though the terrible poison had in her case demonstrated its fearful power by sparing her body and slaying her mind. Elsewhere, it had been merciless, and the poor young girl, who had miraculously escaped death, still had her share of misfortune. Her father by adoption was dead, her protectress lived only to suffer, and her affianced lover was now no more. The frightful intelligence of his death had reached the château on the previous evening. M. Gontran de Kergas, after leaving Jules Noridet, had been suddenly taken ill. His vigorous constitution had resisted for a time, and the effects of the poison in his case had been peculiar. Profound lethargy had alternated for twenty-four hours with sharp crises, but, finally, complete stupor had gained upon him, and Andrée's betrothed, the brilliant naval officer who had braved death in every climate, at last fell into his last sleep at the hotel where he was staying.

But let us return to Chevreuse. There was suddenly a movement in the assembled crowd. The hour of departure had come, and the sad procession began to form. M. de Mathis's farmers would not allow any one but themselves to carry their landlord's body, and the three coffins borne by pious hands were followed by a long line of mourners in deep affliction. Jules Noridet was chief mourner. Pale, with hollow cheeks and reddened eyes surrounded by bluish circles, the unhappy man had grown ten years older within two days, and seemed scarcely able to walk. His footsteps were uncertain, and he was bowed down by a sorrow, the sincerity of which no one thought of suspecting. "He is more to be pitied than the dead," said the sympathizing peasants to one another.

They never thought of looking upon this dashing Parisian as an heir, as he only came to the château at the opening of the shooting season, and they believed that the millions belonging to M. de Mathis would go to his widow and be devoted by her to increasing the prosperity of Chevreuse. Behind the nephew so crushed by grief walked some distant relations, and country neighbours, with the doctor from Versailles, a handsome old man with white

hair, who was a friend as well as a physician at the château. Such a funeral would barely have attracted attention in Paris, but amid the country scenery the picture seemed very touching. The procession moved on towards the village along a narrow path, through a wood where the leaves, already withered by autumn, seemed in mourning. A superb September sun gilded the beech-trees with its light, and birds sung on the boughs above. This contrast of sempiternal nature and human mortality affected even the prosaic minds of the peasantry. There were tears in every eye.

They were about to enter the cemetery when a tall man, clad in the deepest mourning, silently joined the funeral procession. His arrival was only remarked by the old doctor, who welcomed him with a bend of the head, and made him take a place beside him. The open graves were dug in a line in the green turf among wooden crosses and tombstones covered with moss. The supreme moment had now come. Those present formed a circle about the priests, who were saying the final prayers, and then the ropes began to grate against the coffins with a mournful sound which seemed to belong to another world. Jules Noridet was alone, standing with his hands clasped together, at the brink of his uncle's grave. His eyes wandered for a moment over the crowd as though he wished to avoid looking at the bier, but by degrees they were lowered again, and M. de Mathis's nephew bent over the yawning cavity which seemed to fascinate him, as it were. The doctor, pitying his affliction, at last came forward and held him up while the village priest said a word or two of farewell. He spoke with grave simplicity. He praised the virtues and the benevolence of the deceased, and ended by saying that the good man does not wholly die. "The death of the good," said the old minister in a trembling voice, "is but the morning—the aurora—of a new existence, the eternal and happy life of heaven."

The stranger had drawn near the doctor, by degrees, and had seemed to listen with serious attention. Under the influence of a deep impression, no doubt, he repeated in a low but clear voice the old priest's final words. "Yes," he muttered, with strange emphasis, "death is aurora—*mors Aurora*."

As he spoke, a strange scene took place. Jules Noridet, who had half sunk back in the doctor's arms, started as though struck by an electric shock, his hair stood upon end, and his eyes glared wildly around him. "That man! he is here!" he cried, and hiding his face in his hands, he fell prostrate beside the open grave. A name, the name of the poison-dealing negress, articulated by the avenger whom he had just recognised, had struck the guilty nephew like a thunderbolt. His punishment was beginning. He was at once carried to the priest's house hard by, and here he soon recovered consciousness, but remained speechless and motionless. His emotion seemed to have paralyzed him. Meanwhile the stranger walked up and down the little parsonage garden with the aged priest, who was grieved at having been the cause of the occurrence. "I ought to have spared the young man's feelings," said he, "and though I should have regretted not saying 'farewell' in the name of my parishioners to one whom we all mourn for, I should not have spoken had I foreseen what has happened."

"At that young man's age impressions are deep," replied the stranger, "and the sorrow of Monsieur de Mathis's nephew appears to be very sincere and acute."

"You see, sir," said the priest, with a kind smile, "I had forgotten that Monsieur Jules has not yet suffered enough to be able to console himself

for misfortune by thinking of God. But I trust that the mishap won't have any bad consequences. Here comes Monsieur Brias with good news no doubt."

"How is your patient, doctor?" asked the stranger of the physician, who had just entered the garden.

"Much better, sir, and I think that he will be able to return to Paris this evening. It was a swoon caused by the condition of his nerves, and it was not surprising, as this young fellow himself almost died on the day before yesterday."

"Yes, I was told that he had been affected by the poison like the others, and I admire his courage in heading the funeral procession," said the stranger, gravely.

"Monsieur Noridet idolized his uncle, who was very much attached to him in spite of his various youthful follies," said the doctor, in all sincerity; "but as I have had the pleasure of meeting you here, sir, will you allow me to thank you for the help which you gave me on the occasion of the calamity? It was owing to your prescriptions that we at least saved Madame de Mathis's life, and I am glad that chance has again enabled me to meet so learned a member of my profession."

"I beg your pardon," replied the stranger, smiling, "but I have not the honour of being a physician."

"What! you don't belong to the Paris faculty?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Alas, no! to my great regret, and if I was of any use to you it was simply the result of my extensive travel. I have lived in India, and have often had opportunities of observing the effect of vegetable poisons; indeed I acquired a habit, in Asia, of always carrying about me certain counter-poisons which are but little known in Europe. I had come to Chevreuse to look for a country house, and when I heard of the accident, I at once hurried to the château. It was the simplest thing in the world, and my only regret is that I arrived too late to try and save Monsieur de Mathis as well."

"Well, sir, you would do honour to the profession," said M. Brias, somewhat less enthusiastic, since he found that he had not a brother doctor to deal with, "for I myself observed the astonishing effects of the mixture which you prepared, and if I dared I should like to—"

"Ask for my recipe? With pleasure, doctor; and I will send a complete assortment of my counter-poisons to you at Versailles. But will you be kind enough to tell me what you think of Madame de Mathis's present condition?"

"She will live," said the doctor, shaking his head, "but I fear that she will remain paralyzed."

"What a horrible misfortune!" said the stranger. "How much I pity that poor young man, Monsieur Noridet is his name, I believe? I have previously heard of him in society, and I know that he is thought to be very agreeable, and very rich."

"Ah!" said the priest, "Paris is a very dangerous place. I am afraid that this young man has not only placed his soul in peril in that city, but also squandered his property. However, his uncle must have provided for him."

"Certainly," replied the doctor; "I know that Monsieur Mornac, the oldest friend that Monsieur de Mathis possessed, has long had charge of his will, and he has often told me that no one had been forgotten. He is travelling in Switzerland at present, but the sad news will soon bring him

here. I hope so, indeed, on account of Mademoiselle Andrée, whose situation is very painful."

"You mean the young girl, who showed such devotion to Madame de Mathis?" said the stranger, with the liveliest interest.

"Yes; she is an angel of goodness and piety," replied the worthy priest, "and all the poor in the parish bless her name."

"She is alone in the world now!" added M. Brias, with a deep sigh.

The face of the stranger assumed a singular expression, and he made visible efforts to hide his emotion. "You must pray Heaven for Mademoiselle Andrée, your reverence," he said to the priest, "and I am sure that God will watch over her." Then, bowing gravely to his companions, he hurriedly left the garden, entered a brougham which was waiting for him on the road, and drove rapidly away.

The doctor and the priest looked at one another in astonishment. "What a strange man," exclaimed M. Brias, "to go off like that, and not leave me his address! I begin to think that he must be crazy."

"Crazy or not, he is very benevolent, for he gave me a thousand francs for our poor. Besides, he saved poor Madame de Mathis."

"Bah!" said the doctor, who had his own share of vanity, "that was, perhaps, a mere chance, after all. I have no great faith in these foreign quacks, and I will wager that this person won't send his famous recipe. But let us go to see the patient; that is more urgent than chattering here."

They turned their steps towards the parsonage, but at that moment Jules Noridet appeared on the threshold, leaning upon the arm of the priest's old serving-woman. He was lividly pale, and his face still bore traces of the profound emotion he had experienced at the grave-side. His eyes, full of feverish fire, contrasted with his paleness.

"Well, my dear friend, you are up again," said the doctor, gaily. "Let me feel your pulse. Good! the fever isn't so intense. Now, since you are in a condition to start, you must get into my carriage and repair to Versailles with me without going to the château. Your poor aunt doesn't need to see you, and you have had enough excitement for one day at any rate. You can take the seven-thirty train and sleep in Paris, where I will go to see you to-morrow. That is my only prescription, but I shall expect you to keep to it."

Noridet did not reply, but it was easy to see that he wished to ask some question or other. "You were talking with some one just now," he said at last, with an effort.

"Yes; with a foreigner, an eccentric sort of man, who has fallen from the clouds, or from India."

"Ah, my dear doctor," said the worthy priest, with a look of reproach, "I cannot forget that but for him there would have been a grave the more!"

"He took upon himself to prescribe for your aunt," said M. Brias to Noridet, "and I do not deny that his remedy was useful, but that doesn't prevent him from being an odd sort of person."

"What—what has become of him?" said Jules, in a trembling voice.

"Why, just now he vanished like the devil in person—I beg your pardon, your reverence!—like a will-o'-the-wisp," rejoined the doctor.

"Yes; he suddenly got into a carriage and has gone back to Paris," said the priest, in reply to a questioning look from Jules.

"Without giving his name?" said the latter, anxiously.

"Without giving his name, and, indeed, I was very foolish not to ask it," replied M. Brias. "But my carriage is waiting for us, and it is time to start. Come, my dear friend," he added, taking his patient's arm. And thereupon he led Jules away, took him to Versailles, and tended him all the afternoon.

In the evening, at a quarter past eight, Noridet sat in the train bound for the Gare Montparnasse in Paris. Just as the engine drew up he espied some carriages which were being gathered together near by, to form the Brest train, and he watched this operation like a man seeking some diversion of thought. His eyes mechanically turned to a strange looking vehicle painted green which stood upon a truck. The station lamps lit up the interior of this vehicle, and Noridet saw that it was occupied by two men, dressed in mourning. He thereupon began to look more attentively, but a moment later a slight noise caused him to turn his head. He was alone in his compartment, but some one outside on the platform said to him in an ironical tone : "Monsieur Jules, don't forget to salute the vehicle which is bearing the body of your friend Gontran de Kergas to Brittany."

Noridet hastily looked out of the carriage window which was open ; but he could not see the person who had spoken, although he had recognised his voice. There was a crowd on the platform and the terrible stranger had disappeared.

After a moment's hesitation Noridet alighted. He had taken a resolution, and while he elbowed his way through the crowd, he said to himself : "I must find out to-night who this man is."

During the journey from Chevreuse to Paris he had had time to reflect and recover his composure. His mind was not one of those which are resigned to uncertainty, and he wished at any cost to rally against the prostration which repeated shocks had brought about. If he had for a time yielded to the ascendancy of M. Lugos, it was with the determination to throw off his yoke as soon as might be feasible, and even if he must commit another crime to do so. However, to struggle against his dangerous adversary, with any prospect of success, he must find out exactly what manner of man he really was.

The opportunity now offered was a good one, and Noridet wished to profit by it. By following the stranger he might find out where he lived, and perhaps learn his real name. The great thing was not to lose the scent. The day had been a very fine one, and the passengers returning from Versailles formed a compact throng ; however Noridet calculated that the rush would necessarily slacken when the people reached the door where the tickets were being taken.

So he pushed forward, and instead of looking here and there in the crowd, he fixed his eyes upon the exit which the passengers were approaching one after another ; and at last, ten paces ahead, he saw the stranger quietly hand his ticket to the collector and then leisurely pass on without turning round.

The chase had begun very well, and Noridet manœuvred with as much prudence as skill. In a few seconds he had given his own ticket and then saw his man going down the steps of the station. "Ah !" thought Noridet. "He no doubt imagines that his second appearance produced the same effect upon me as the first one ; he thinks that I have again fainted away. "But once is enough, Monsieur Lugos," added Jules, clenching his fists. "We will have it out together, now !"

Raising the collar of his overcoat to hide his face, he began to descend

the steps without losing sight of his enemy. It seemed likely that the latter would take a cab, and Noridet trembled lest he might be unable to follow him. However, after stopping for a moment under the portico to light a cigar, thus giving his adversary time to study his dress and appearance, M. Lugos set out on foot across the Boulevard Montparnasse at the pace of a man who is in no great hurry, and turned down the Rue de Rennes on the right hand side. Noridet took the opposite side of the street, keeping carefully in the rear. Besides the thoroughfare was full of people, and there was little danger of being noticed. When the stranger had reached the junction of the Rue de Vaugirard, he halted for a moment but did not turn round; and finally he proceeded to the left.

Noridet, who lived in the Rue du Helder and passed his life between the Boulevards and the Bois de Boulogne, did not know the streets in which he now found himself. This was a great disadvantage, as the stranger might vanish round some unexpected corner; and thus Jules was obliged to approach nearer in order not to lose sight of him. M. Lugos went on down the Rue Saint-Placide to the Rue de Sèvres, and then directed his course towards the Boulevard des Invalides. As he seemed to be, in a manner, retracing his steps, Noridet for an instant suspected that he knew he was being followed and was trying to throw his pursuer off the track; but his anxiety ceased when, ten paces further on, the stranger turned round the corner of the Rue Vanneau and quietly entered the first house on the left hand side.

Noridet felt a thrill of delight, the first he had experienced for three days past. His plan had succeeded. His enemy had been run to earth, and all he now had to do was to follow him into the house he had entered. This undertaking, however, was not without its difficulties. In the first place, M. Lugos might be simply visiting a friend, and, in fact, it did not seem likely that he resided in any such place as this. The house was old and black, the walls seemed ready to fall, and at the end of the passage down which he had gone there were glimpses of empty barrels, piles of boards, and bits of iron. It was clear that this old building was only occupied by poor artisans, and, besides, the many different ealings which were seemingly plied there made it quite unfit to shelter anything mysterious. It was as open as a market, could be entered and left most readily, for the entrance portal was wide open, and it was scarcely likely that there was any doorkeeper. Noridet, therefore, had not the usual resource of sounding the janitor after slipping a louis into his hand, and was greatly perplexed as to what to do next. However, an idea occurred to him. Taking out his pocket-book he removed his cards and the papers bearing his name, left two bank-notes of a hundred francs each inside, and resolutely entered the dirty passage. A bright light was shining at the end of this passage, and a hammer could be heard resounding on an anvil. Guided by the noise and the light, Noridet speedily reached a shabby-looking workshop where a man was making a carriage-spring.

"Can I speak two words to you, my good fellow?" he asked.

The workman turned upon him a blackened face with a pair of remarkably bright eyes, "Three, if you like," he answered in a rough tone.

"The matter is this," said Noridet: "as I was going along the Rue de Sèvres I saw this pocket-book dropped by a gentleman who came in here. You must have seen him pass by, and if you can tell me his name and the floor he lives on, I will go up and give to him his property. There are some bank-notes inside."

As the blacksmith made no haste to reply, Noridet imagined that he would not be sorry to profit by the finding of the pocket-book, and accordingly he added : "If he gives any reward I will go shares with you."

"Well, upon my word, I should not refuse," said the workman, "for work is dull, but I can't tell you anything about the gentleman, as I didn't see him come in. I'm busy hammering, and I don't often turn round."

"The deuce ! I don't know what to do about it," replied Noridet, with a well-feigned look of disappointment. "I can't go to all the doors."

"Oh, don't take that trouble ! We've nobody living here who carries any bank-notes in his pocket. The rich fellow, who lost that pocket-book, must have come here to give some order or other, and will be coming down presently. If you care about returning him his flimsies, you have only to wait here."

"That is a good idea," said Noridet, "but I won't trouble you, I'll smoke a cigar outside. After all, I need merely take the pocket-book to police headquarters if I don't find my man."

"You can't miss him ; there's only one door to the house," said the smith, cutting the conversation short by dealing a fierce blow with his hammer.

Noridet went away, satisfied with the result of his inquiries. It, indeed, appeared probable that M. Lugos would presently go off, and the surest way was to wait outside. Jules only had to watch and keep out of sight. Now the street was very narrow, and a lamp lit it brightly at that point, so that he could not stand there without being seen. However, he soon found a convenient place for a look-out. Fronting the house there was a shop which seemed to be a kind of café or second-rate restaurant. Noridet examined its window, behind which stood a salad-bowl, filled with stewed prunes floating in a doubtful looking syrup. The curtains were half raised, so that he also espied a table at which no one was seated, inside. He went in, took possession of this post of observation, and in order to win the publican's respect, and have a right to remain some time, he ordered some punch. As the preparation of this luxurious beverage would occupy some little time, and M. Lugos might appear at any moment, Noridet held himself in readiness to fling a coin upon the table and run out without swallowing the liquor, if need were, and that although he might be taken for a madman. However, this precaution proved needless. He had time to swallow, in little sips, the frightful decoction prepared for him, which he did not dare to leave for fear of attracting attention. Two hours passed by in this way. The place was deserted by one customer after another, and still the stranger did not appear outside. Soon, only four old men of mean appearance remained playing a seemingly endless game of dominos, and exchanging covert remarks about the eccentric punch-drinker whose eyes never left the street.

Noridet now began to feel very ill at ease. He thought that these humble cits probably took him for a detective, and he even observed that the mistress of the establishment was watching him stealthily. The position was no longer tenable. He paid his score, and had risen to go out, when through the window he suddenly saw that M. Lugos was standing on the sidewalk. Although his heart fairly leapt, he had the strength to control himself, and tarried for a moment before approaching the door, so as to give the stranger time to go on in advance. Then he cautiously slipped into the street. The undertaking now offered serious chances of success. He saw M. Lugos turn the corner of the Rue de Sèvres, walk rapidly towards a cabstand, follow the line of vehicles, and begin to give directions

to the driver, who was first on the rank. In an instant Noridet got into the last cab on the stand, and said to the jehu: "Follow the cab which is just about to start. Twenty francs if you can keep it in sight without going too near."

"I understand, sir," replied the cabby, climbing up on his box.

M. Lugos was, no doubt, giving some complicated directions to his driver, for he did not start at once; but finally, the first vehicle drove away, and Noridet's went after it; following the Rue du Bac, crossing the Pont Royal, and the Carrousel, and then starting along the Rue de Richelieu. M. Lugos was, no doubt, on his way home. Finally, his cab turned into the Boulevard des Italiens, and Noridet, who was delighted at the turn affairs had taken, muttered to himself. "I was sure of it! He lives in the neighbourhood of the Madeleine."

Suddenly, however, he started with surprise. The cab he was following turned down the Rue du Helder, and in an instant later stopped in front of the house where he, Noridet, himself resided. What new danger was foreshadowed by this visit from the stranger? The unlucky Jules scarcely dared to ask himself this question. However, M. Lugos did not appear, and the coachman having left his box to feed his horses, it looked as though he were about to wait there some time. Still no one alighted from the vehicle.

Noridet could not endure this for long. Forgetting all prudence, he sprang out of his cab and looked into the one standing ahead. It was empty.

Noridet restrained the cry of surprise which was about to escape his lips, and at once thought of gaining some information from the driver, who was walking up and down, smoking his pipe. Jules was quick-witted and had soon devised a way of entering into conversation. "Did my friend get out on the way then?" he asked in a careless tone.

"Your friend?" replied the driver, much surprised.

"Yes, the gentleman who took you in the Rue de Sèvres. We agreed to meet here, but I don't see him anywhere."

"Oh, that gentleman! Well he couldn't get out, for he didn't get in."

"What do you say?"

"He didn't get in, sir. He paid me for an hour, at the cab-stand, and told me to go and wait for him in the Rue du Helder till half past twelve. I think that my horses must have struck his fancy, and he wanted to give them a trial."

Noridet began to understand matters. "Good! good!" said he, pretending to know what it all meant. "He must have gone to pay a visit in the Faubourg Saint-Germain before coming to his appointment here."

"That's very likely, as he went off on foot towards the Croix Rouge, and seemed to be in a great hurry."

"Then I shall wait for him. Thank you, driver!"

"Oh, you needn't thank me, sir, but if your friend is not here in half an hour, I have two good horses that will take you home in a jiffy."

"I dare say! I'll take a turn and come back," answered Noridet, sauntering carelessly towards his own cab, which stood at some little distance in the rear.

He had succeeded in concealing the rage he felt. M. Lugos had got the better of him; that he was forced to realise, and his carefully planned pursuit had ended in ignominious defeat. As he walked along, he turned over in his mind all the incidents of the day, and clearly divined what must have taken place. The stranger had seen that he was followed, and the

manœuvre in the Rue de Sèvres had been a premeditated trick. Instead of getting into the cab, M. Lugos had quietly continued his journey on foot, letting his enemy follow an empty vehicle. The choice of the address given to the driver, left no doubt as to the intended irony. Noridet could not forgive himself for having fallen into so simple a snare, and he moreover began to reflect as to the consequences of his failure. As the formidable stranger must know that he was spied upon, his revenge would be swift and terrible, and Noridet shuddered at the thought, for, in spite of his vanity, he realised that he had to deal with a man who was vastly superior to himself in cunning.

Julcs was no common fellow. He had been born with every natural advantage of mind and person. Tall, distinguished-looking, and of elegant carriage, a fine rider, a good marksman and swordsman, he also had a deal of mental ability, and his education and will would have enabled him to succeed in any career, had he deigned to select one. Men did not like him, but they feared him for his sarcastic language; which he never restrained, being always ready to fight those whom his speech offended. Women liked him all the better, as he professed to think but little of them; and he had made numerous conquests in the fashionable Parisian world. However, he had had the double misfortune of losing his mother in his infancy, and of having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and all his natural gifts had merely led to frightful depravity. At twenty-seven years of age, Noridet believed in nothing and feared nothing, not even death.

And yet, for the past two days, this courageous man had trembled with fear of M. Lugos. However, it was much less the thought of punishment for his crime that troubled him than the thought of being obliged to submit to a stranger's dictates. He had, on the occasion of M. Lugos's first visit, felt that electric shock, by which a fortunate gambler is startled when a new opponent faces him, and he feels that luck is about to abandon him. Noridet was determined to play his perilous game to the end, but now he felt that he would lose it.

After half an hour spent in gloomy thoughts in his cab, to which he had returned to continue watching, he saw the driver of the vehicle in front climb on to his box again and whip up his meagre steeds, after consulting his watch. The time appointed by M. Lugos as the limit for waiting was now up, and he had not appeared.

Noridet felt that need of excitement which almost always accompanies a failure, and in spite of his great fatigue he had no inclination to follow Dr. Brias's prescription and go to bed. He did not care to repair to his club on the day of his uncle's funeral, but as his stomach had been upset by the Rue Vanneau punch, he determined to repair to the Maison d'Or and take a cup of tea in a private room.

He was walking along the passage on the first floor of that establishment, so well known to those who like to feed at night-time, when, on passing the open door of a small saloon, he heard himself called by name. Annoyed at being recognised, he turned and beheld a light-haired young man, who was calling to him while partaking of a cold partridge. "Come in, my dear friend; I am all alone, and we will chat a little," cried the individual who was thus feasting himself, and whose mouth was full. "I have a message for you."

This meeting was by no means pleasant to Noridet, who had just recognised Alfred Brossin, a beardless fop, whose chatter was invariably most insipid, and he was about to cut him, when suddenly M. Lugos's conversa-

tion recurred to his mind, and although desirous of avoiding the foolish young fellow, he paused. The name of Brossin had been mentioned by the stranger in connection with his plans, and an ill-defined feeling of curiosity urged Noridet to enter the room.

Young Alfred professed great admiration for M. de Mathis's stylish nephew. He copied his neckties and the cut of his pantaloons, and never missed a chance of being seen with the man whom he seriously called Jules "de" Noridet. Thus, on now beholding him, he began to indulge in various exclamations intended to acquaint all the people supping near by, with the fact that his illustrious friend had deigned to favour him with his company.

"Good evening, Jules," he cried, in a loud voice, as he re-opened the door which Noridet had closed on entering. "How is it that you missed the races? I won twenty-five louis from the viscount, and Nelly asked me where you were. By-the-bye, do you know that Raoul is friends again with Violette? I took supper with them yesterday in the Grand Seize, and it was up to the mark, I tell you."

"Excuse me," interrupted Noridet, "but are you really anxious to talk about Nelly and Violette to the persons passing along the passage, and to communicate my name to all the neighbours?"

"Why, no, my dear friend; but it is really so warm with the door shut."

"We will open the window if you like, but I do not wish to take my tea in public on the very day when I have had the grief of burying my uncle," replied Noridet, in a grave tone.

"Sure enough, now you remind me! You're his heir, eh? Two or three millions of francs? That's pretty stiff! Such luck won't come to me for a long time."

"I don't know what Monsieur de Mathis's will may contain, and you seemingly know better than I do what his fortune amounts to."

"Bah! All Paris knows it. Why, my mother told me all about it yesterday."

"What! does Madame Brossin honour me by taking an interest in my affairs?" asked Noridet in a somewhat sarcastic tone.

"I should think so, indeed, and so does my sister? They talk about nothing else but you and your pair of chestnuts."

"I am really flattered!"

"Ah! I came very near forgetting my message. My mother considers that you are the most elegant man in Paris, and she wants you to come and spend a couple of weeks with us in Normandy. You won't be bored, I promise you."

"I am very sorry to disappoint your mother," replied Noridet, in a dry tone, "but I am in mourning, and, besides, I have important business to settle here."

"We are not going till next week, and my sister says that mourning does not keep people from visiting in the country."

While Noridet sipped his tea, he thought over this invitation, which appeared strange to him. He imagined that an attempt was being made to effect a match between himself and Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin; and as this young lady's hand did not at all tempt him—although her father was very rich—he resolved to prevent all persistence by refusing point blank. "I shall have the honour of going to thank Madame Brossin," he said, right frigidly, "but I cannot commit an impropriety to please her."

"Well! well! my dear friend, let us say no more about it!" exclaimed the fair-haired young fellow. "I have delivered my message, and if I were as rich as you are, I shouldn't cut the boulevard, not I. It is all very well for a poor beggar like me to go and bury himself in Normandy just as the autumn races are beginning, but, between ourselves, I shall bolt every now and then and come here. In the first place, I promised Argentine that I would do so. If my affair only succeeds to-morrow, you'll see!"

"You have some business afoot?" said Noridet, smiling.

"Yes, and a serious matter, too! Thirty thousand francs, my dear sir, thirty thousand for six months, at nine per cent, with a commission—"

"Which will double the rate of interest. That is a serious matter, my dear Alfred, I must admit it."

"Oh, of course, you are poking fun at me because you've got millions behind you. But if you had a father like mine, and nothing else, you wouldn't think Monsieur Ménager's terms too hard. Besides, he doesn't look like an extortioner, though he lives in such a mean street. But, however, that may be, I don't care, and you can understand that to get hold of my thirty thousand I would go six times a day to the Rue Vanneau."

"The Rue Vanneau!" repeated Noridet in surprise.

"Yes. I'll bet you don't even know where that is! If you could only see the house! There is a smith on the ground floor, a cabinetmaker on the first floor, and a shoemaker on the third one. Ménager lives on the second. Three windows at the back, a tile floor, and an alabaster clock under a globe; but there's a safe, my friend, a safe, and when I think that he will open it to-morrow and take out thirty nice bank-notes for me, it seems too good to be true!"

This recollection of the seductive safe made Alfred so enthusiastic that he could not refrain from executing a few steps which did not seem to belong to any known dance, unless it were a negro *bamboula*. However, Noridet did not appear to appreciate this chorographical effort; he still remained lost in thought.

"Won't they all stare at the Gnat Club?" continued Alfred. "Unless, indeed, Ménager should refuse to accept my friend Vergoncey's indorsement," he added, stopping short; "but, after all, Vergoncey owns landed property in the Gâtinais. The fellow insists upon two signatures."

"You say that this man Ménager lives in the Rue Vanneau?" asked Noridet, suddenly.

"Yes, my dear fellow, near the corner of the Rue de Sèvres."

"Well, as he might refuse your friend's guarantee, I will give you mine on conditions that we go to Ménager's together. It will amuse me."

"What! will you indorse my notes?"

"Why not? Call for me to-morrow at three o'clock," said Noridet, who espied a chance of getting on the right scent after M. Lugos once more. But at this moment a waiter entered the room, and addressing M. de Mathis's nephew, exclaimed: "Here is a letter which has just been brought for you, sir."

"Some woman, I suppose?" said Alfred, while his friend opened a common-looking envelope. However, as Noridet read, he turned pale. "Hallo! he's disinherited!" thought young Brossin, "I shan't get that indorsement!"

The letter which his friend had received contained but these few words:

"You have been endeavouring to-night to find out who I am. I warn

you that any attempt of this kind will prove futile, and will be severely punished. Consider that as a certainty and await my orders."

III.

ON the morning after the supper at which Noridet received the above curt missive from a waiter at the Maison d'Or, a cab, a genuine English hansom—a private one, of course—could be seen going at a rapid pace up the Rue de Bellechasse, in the Faubourg St. Germain. This hansom—an odd-looking vehicle for the Parisians—was occupied by a young gentleman, who was reading a slip of paper, and giving way to unmistakable signs of annoyance.

"That is a little too strong! Nobody fools me that way! He needn't think that I'm going to swallow that." Such were a few of his remarks; and this choice language will suffice for the reader to recognise the occupant of the hansom as M. Noridet's young friend, Alfred Brossin.

If Alfred thus elegantly expressed his vexation, it was because he was reading a letter couched as follows:—"My dear boy,—I cannot have the pleasure of going with you to M. Ménager's to-day; for I am obliged to start for Chevreuse this morning. But I shall be at your disposal in a few days' time.—Sincerely yours, JULES NORIDET."

Now, Alfred took this unexpected departure for a refusal in disguise, and he guessed rightly.

M. Lugos's threats had checked Noridet's inquisitiveness, and he had gone home greatly perplexed. After ripe reflection, he had made up his mind to renounce, at least for the time being, any attempt against an enemy so well informed and so thoroughly on the defensive. He thought it wiser to keep the indications furnished him by chance in mind, and to wait for a better opportunity. Besides, he had an idea of following a new scheme, which needed a few days' preparation. So he renounced availing himself of the chance now afforded of effecting an entry into the house in the Rue Vanneau; and this, although he instinctively divined that there was some secret bond between the usurer on the second floor and his mysterious persecutor.

As for the service which he had offered to do his chance friend on the evening before, he had not really had any thought of keeping his promise. He considered Alfred to be a young imbecile, who would never prove of any use to him, and besides, he thought the sudden affection of the whole Brossin family to be most suspicious. Thus the letter was a mere put-off, and Alfred was right in looking upon it as such. The situation in which he found himself was a trying one, for his future as regards money matters depended for the time being entirely upon the result of his interview with M. Ménager.

His father doled him out regularly a meagre monthly allowance of three hundred francs, which scarcely sufficed to pay for his cigars, gloves, and neckties. However, Baron Brossin was a rigid man of high principles, who, according to his own declarations, was solely indebted to his own exertions for his position, and did not understand anything whatever about the exigencies of fashionable life. Alfred felt a shudder run down his back at the thought of confessing his debts to his father; and for two years past he had been in the habit of applying with success to obliging tradespeople who made no scruple about supplying the wants of sons whose

fathers were millionaires ; however, after receiving a certain number of those remarkable waistcoats, the pockets of which contain banknotes, and which are charged twelve hundred francs apiece in the bill, young Alfred had completely exhausted his credit, and saw with terror that the moment was at hand when he would be reduced to the limited portion represented by his father's allowance. Now this prospect wounded his feelings cruelly. There was the Gnat club, where they were threatening to post him for a bet made at the La Marche races, and so far left unsettled. Above all, there was Mademoiselle Argentine, the leading lady at the Fantaisies Comiques, who threatened to jilt him if he continued to make her stand and beg for the diamonds which she wished to wear in a new extravaganza, in which she was to fill the important part of the golden scarabee.

In view of so terrible a disaster, M. Ménager appeared as the only safeguard from shipwreck. But Baron Brossin's presumptive heir was not nearly so sure of the money-lender's consent as he pretended to be, and as his cab turned into the Rue Vanneau, he felt that particular kind of dread which one experiences when one is about to have a tooth drawn or when one goes to borrow money. On reaching the house which M. Lugos had entered on the day before, he had a strong desire to run away, but the image of the exasperated Argentine rose up before him, and so he dashed resolutely along the dark passage.

The way was familiar to him, for he had already called twice upon the money-lender, who on his first visit had promised to make the necessary inquiries, and on the second to lend him thirty thousand francs providing he brought him some good name as indorsement. It was the artful Argentine who had told her admirer where M. Ménager lived, he being well known moreover among needy "mashers." The young man went up the stairs four at a time, and on reaching the second landing, where there was a yellow door he gave a sharp ring, as though he dared not allow himself time for reflection. However, a somewhat long delay followed the ringing of the bell.

"Can he be out?" thought Alfred to himself. "Mischievous take it! that wouldn't do at all."

But presently the sound of footsteps drawing cautiously near made our novice's heart beat fast ; the door opened, and the capitalist of the Rue Vanneau appeared in person.

He doubtless recognised his visitor, for he drew back to let him in, at the same time making him a polite bow. "You are punctual, sir, and that is a quality which I greatly admire," he finally said, with a smile which seemed to the young man to promise well.

"I have brought the name you asked for, and I hope that we shall be able to come to an understanding to-day," said Alfred at once.

"I hope so, too," replied the money-lender in a tone of great cordiality ; "but I must ask your permission to finish a business matter with another client—I will be with you in a moment."

"Certainly, certainly!" replied the dandy, enchanted at this beginning.

M. Ménager, who was attired in a morning suit that was almost elegant, had superb black whiskers, and by no means a disagreeable face. He looked more like a head clerk than a money-lender at heavy interest, and it would have taken a much better reader of character than young Brossin to observe the hard lines about his mouth and the searching look hidden by his blue spectacles. After offering his visitor an arm-chair upholstered in Utrecht velvet, the usurer bowed, retired by an inner door, which he took

care to bolt behind him, and crossing a rather large sitting room, scantily furnished, entered a kind of small study where a woman, reclining in an easy-chair, was waiting for him, smoking a cigarette. "I beg your pardon, my dear," said M. Ménager, seating himself at his desk, "but I have a visitor whom I particularly wish to see. He wishes to become one of our clients."

"All right, my dear, business comes first. That is a settled thing. Let us end ours, and then I will let you pluck your new pigeon undisturbed."

The woman who spoke in this prosaic fashion turned a pair of large dark blue eyes upon the usurer. Her dazzling beauty contrasted strangely with the commonplace appearance of the room. In fact, amid the green cardboard boxes, the mean furniture and faded curtains, this splendid creature looked like some Greek statue overlooked at a sale. Her tight-fitting black silk dress displayed the pure outlines of her figure, and her face revealed her Southern origin by its warm opaque whiteness set off by ruddy lips and jet black hair.

"Has your pigeon any gilded feathers?" she resumed, laughing.

"Not many just now, but his father will have to take up his bills when due."

"Don't trust so much to that, my dear friend! I know more than one father who would refuse to do so, beginning by an intimate acquaintance of mine, Baron Brossin."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the money-lender, with a peculiar smile. "Then, if his son ever comes to me—he has a son, I believe—I will remember what you say."

"That's your business, my dear! I give you my savings to take care of, and you pay me fifteen per cent. interest. I don't prevent you from getting twice as much out of your customers; but I certainly don't expect to bear your losses."

"That has been understood between us for a long time past, my dear Impéria, and I don't think you have yet had to complain of our speculations."

"No, indeed; and the proof of it is that I have brought you a thousand francs which I managed to extort from the virtuous baron yesterday, and which will run up my credit account with you to four hundred and twenty thousand francs."

"You have a great head for business, my dear friend; but our customer will be getting impatient. Be kind enough to give me a receipt for the September dividends."

"With pleasure, Ménager, with pleasure!" replied the beautiful Impéria, signing in a pretty English hand the much less harmonious name of Irma Balandard. "Five thousand six hundred and fifty francs in a month isn't bad," she added, gaily. "And yet there are people who will buy stock!"

With this exclamation full of practical common sense, Mademoiselle Impéria rose up and adjusted her bonnet before the looking-glass. "Come this way, if you please," now said the usurer, opening a private door scarcely perceptible in the woodwork; "you know that the staircase leads out into the Rue de Sèvres."

"Yes, I took care to leave my carriage there. Good-bye, my dear Ménager, till I see you again at the end of October."

The usurer closed the door behind his pretty visitor, and then slowly crossed the reception-room. His face now wore a strange expression, and his lips were curved into an evil smile revealing his white teeth.

"Now, Monsieur Alfred Brossin," he muttered, "we'll have a chat together. Your father's money ought to bring you good luck."

Meantime, young Alfred was awaiting his return with very natural impatience. The money-lender's gracious manners had led him to suppose that he was favourably inclined towards him, and indeed he was convinced that the famous cash-box would be opened for his benefit that very day. His delight was evident from the lively manner in which he was humming an air from Offenbach's "Belle Hélène," and indeed if he had not thought it unbusiness-like, he would have begun to dance the fantastic steps in which he had indulged at the Maison d'Or.

"The bearded king who advances,
King who advances,
King who advances,
The bearded king who advances
'Tis Agamemnon!"

thus hummed M. Brossin, junior, as he heard M. Ménager approaching. At last the door opened, and the money-lender appeared, more amiable, to all seeming, than ever.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, "for making you wait,"—this in a very soft tone of voice—"and be kind enough to step into my office."

Alfred did not require any urging to do so. He felt so light-hearted that his feet scarcely seemed to feel the tiled floor which he had described the evening before to Noridet.

When he reached the sanctuary, M. Ménager offered him the easy-chair in which the beautiful Impéria had been seated a few moments before, and resumed his own place at his desk. The room was so arranged that the light fell brightly upon the usurer's visitors, while he himself, seated with his back to the only window, remained almost in the shade. Thanks to this arrangement, which put one in mind of the precautions taken in the offices of investigating magistrates, M. Ménager was able to note upon his customers' features whatever changes of expression might result from his well-calculated refusals or ambiguous promises. The client's face thus became a sort of thermometer, which indicated the greater or lesser keenness of his need. This skilful strategy, so well adapted to business purposes, troubled young Alfred but little, for he was absorbed in the contemplation of an immense safe which stood against the wall at one end of the room, and looked like a sort of monument. The direction which his eyes had taken did not escape M. Ménager, for the evil smile returned to his face again. "Sir," said he, assuming the tone and manner of a man of the world, "I hope you do not take me for a usurer." Alfred, amazed at this beginning, wriggled uneasily on his chair, and protested by his gestures against such a supposition. "I fancy that I haven't the appearance, or the age of a usurer," added M. Ménager, leaning his elbow gracefully upon the desk.

"Certainly not," stammered young Brossin, "but I thought—you said—you know—"

"That I could lend you some money," interrupted M. Ménager, laughing. "I am still inclined to do so."

Alfred drew a long breath of relief.

"This money, however, is not my own," said Mademoiselle Impéria's partner, "and I am simply acting as the agent of several capitalists in the provinces who have confided their interests to me."

Alfred could scarcely refrain from making a gesture which would have amounted to saying: "What the dickens is that to me, so long as you lend me the money."

"I wish to have this clearly understood," resumed M. Ménager, "so that you may know that the conditions of the loan are pre-determined, and that I have no power to alter them."

"Certainly, certainly!" sputtered out Alfred, who had this adverb always ready, "we needn't discuss the rate of interest; besides, I have brought you an excellent indorsement."

"Then there is no reason why we should not end the matter to-day. You have the papers with you?"

"Here they are," said the young man, as a flush of delight overspread his cheeks. "Three of ten thousand and one of five thousand at six months, signed by me and indorsed by one of my friends, a rich landowner, Monsieur Théodore de Vergoncey."

Alfred hesitated a moment in pronouncing his friend's name, and waited with some anxiety to see what effect would be produced by the signature of the man with property in the Gâtinais. However, the money-lender said nothing, and his face expressed nothing. "It would be easy for you to make inquiries in Paris or Orleans," added Alfred hastily.

"That is quite unnecessary," replied M. Ménager, with an encouraging smile. "I already know all about Monsieur Vergoncey."

"Then," said Alfred, triumphantly, "you know that he owns considerable property."

"I know that his father, formerly overseer for the Marquis de Perthes, left him a pretty little farm, which must bring him in three or four thousand francs a-year, and I have always admired the skilful manner in which the young man has turned this little income to account."

"But Théodore is rich, I assure you," said Alfred, quite disconcerted; "besides, he is a very punctual fellow, and always meets his engagements."

An icy look from M. Ménager made M. Vergoncey's apologist stop short. "I do not dispute his good qualities," said the usurer in a dry tone, "but his signature has no value for me."

A thunderbolt falling near young Brossin would scarcely have terrified him more than this reply did. It was useless to insist. The refusal was as sharp as the edge of a hatchet. The unlucky borrower twisted about on his chair, and pitcously gazed at the notes bearing the useless signature of his friend. The voice of the money-lender, now becoming milder, roused him from his fit of despair. "I am very sorry," said M. Ménager, "not to be able to satisfy you. I know the needs of young men, and I take an interest in them; you no doubt greatly relied upon this money?"

"Yes, indeed!" sighed Mademoiselle Argentine's admirer.

"Come, now," said the usurer, in a fatherly tone, "it is impossible that you have no more reliable friends than Monsieur Vergoncey. Living in the society you do, you must know men of large fortune, and if you can give me a good indorsement, we can settle this matter to-day."

"Why, by the way, now I think of it," cried Brossin, eager to clutch at any hope, "would you accept the signature of Monsieur Jules 'de' Noridet?"

A flash of delight darted from the eyes of M. Ménager, but it was hidden from Alfred by the blue spectacles. Besides, the young fellow was too full of his own purposes to observe his companion.

"Monsieur Noridet, the nephew of Monsieur de Mathis, the rich Creole who died so suddenly quite lately?"

"Himself. He is his uncle's heir, besides."

"Well, I will accept his guarantee at once; Monsicur Noridet is very rich, and highly honourable."

"Then it's all right!" exclaimed Alfred, enthusiastically. "He offered me his name yesterday, and if he had not been obliged to go into the country this morning he would have come here with me to-day. See! I have his letter here!"

Thereupon he held out Noridet's note to M. Ménager, who took it and read it attentively. The usurer's hands trembled a little, but this was not noticed by young Brossin, who was in the highest spirits.

"That is all right, sir," said the man of business, returning the letter, "and if this name were on the notes you have brought me, I would lend you the thirty thousand francs at once."

"He will soon be back, and at all events I can wait two or three days," said Alfred.

"In two or three days it would be too late."

"Why?"

"That is easy to see. I am, as I told you, only an agent for others. When an affair, which I approve of, presents itself, I write to the country and the money is sent me, and I give it in exchange for good notes. But I must render an immediate account of the operation, and the people behind me don't allow the money to remain idle in my cash-box, as they always have a use for it. The thirty thousand francs which I intended to lend to you to-day will be used elsewhere to-morrow, and I shall send them back this evening, though I very much dislike having to do so, for I shall seem to have been acting without due reflection. If you had spoken of Monsieur Vergoncey the other day, we should have avoided all this; but, after all, you are more put out than I am, and I cannot take you to task."

Young Brossin was in the position of a drowning man, who catches at the first thing within his reach.

"But, my dear Monsieur Ménager," said he, timidly, "can't you get your acquaintance to send you back the money when I have seen my friend?"

"It is easy to see," said the usurer, with a smile, "that you know nothing at all about business. When these gentlemen hear of what has occurred to-day, they won't think this matter of any account. They would refuse me at once if I should attempt to insist."

Alfred bit his nails in his rage.

"But now I think of it," resumed M. Ménager, "couldn't you see Monsieur Noridet to-day?"

"He is ten leagues from here," replied the young man, hoarsely.

"Well, then, let us say no more about it; I had the money ready. I shall keep it in my safe till this evening," said the money-lender, quietly, as he drew a packet of bank-notes from his pocket.

The sight of the flimsies affected Alfred like an electric shock. He gazed at them, fixedly, and his imagination evoked all the enjoyment that might be procured, thanks to these scraps of paper. "If—if I could bring you the signature to-day?" he stammered.

"Oh, then we would conclude matters at once," replied the usurer. "Are you sure that Monsieur Noridet has gone to Chevreuse? You might ascertain that."

"That is what I am going to do. But even if I find him he might not have time to come here; do you insist upon seeing him as well as me?" asked Alfred, whose face had now become very pale.

"Not at all. I know Monsieur Noridet's signature very well, and besides, I have perfect confidence in you," said M. Ménager. "Come," he added, pleasantly, "I will wait till half-past five before I send back the money; so you will have plenty of time to find your friend."

"I will go in search of him," said Alfred, rising abruptly.

The money-lender thereupon showed him out and made any number of ceremonious bows as he bade him good-day and expressed a hope that he would soon return.

"Jules Noridet is at this moment at Chevreuse," muttered M. Ménager, as he slowly returned to his office, "and yet Monsieur Brossin's son will return here in two hours' time with his friend's signature." At this point the usurer's face assumed an expression of infernal delight. "One can always tell good blood!" he added, bursting into a loud laugh.

IV.

If Mademoiselle Argentine could have seen her admirer as he came down M. Ménager's stairs, she would have entertained serious doubts as to ever possessing the diamond earrings which she wished to wear on the first night of the "Golden Scarabee." Young Alfred looked very glum indeed. However, the star of the Fantaisies-Comiques was just finishing luncheon with the second lover of the company she belonged to, and was not in any wise thinking of Baron Brossin's heir. As for her unlucky adorer he indulged in an animated soliloquy on his way to his handsome, a sure sign that he was greatly disturbed in mind.

"He will wait for Noridet's signature till half-past five, and it is three already!" he sighed. "Where does he expect me to find Noridet? There's Vergoncey, too, who'll be waiting at Tortoni's for me and expecting his three thousand francs! All his fault, anyhow, boasting about his 'property' in the Gâtinais!"

As Alfred expressed his grief in this touching fashion he reached the Rue Vanneau, and his coachman increased his perplexity by asking where he should drive him.

"To the boulevard in front of Tortoni's," he at last answered, as he sprang into the cab. "Bah! Théodore's wide awake; he'll tell me what to do."

In point of fact, young Brossin was not thinking of his doubtful friend's advice. He meant to screw up his courage to commit a forgery by drinking a bottle of champagne. This idea, perfidiously suggested by the money-lender, had now taken root in Alfred's brain, and of all the usurer's talk he only remembered the tempting words: "I will give you thirty thousand francs this evening if you bring me Monsieur Noridet's signature."

Now the unscrupulous young fellow had already resolved to bring this signature even though it cost him a crime. But his mind was in the preparatory stage so to say. He did not yet confess to himself that he had resolved to dishonour his name. If conscience could be dissected like a viscus, an anatomist could have found the germ of crime in Brossin's; however, the future forger still tried to persuade himself that he would not be driven to imitate his friend's signature. He relied on finding Noridet at home, though he knew him to be absent; he counted on Vergoncey's sug-

gesting some expedient ; in a word, upon some miracle, whereas the inflexible logic of vice ever suggested to his mind : "It solely depends upon yourself to have the money this evening."

It was in this frame of mind that Alfred alighted at Tortoni's. He went rapidly through the front room and found M. Vergoncey taking a glass of sugared water in the smoking-gallery.

The fascinating Théodore was a tall fellow with fair hair and a tolerably good appearance. His features were regular, his eyes of a china blue tint, his silky whiskers were curled in the most artistic manner, while his small mouth was invariably pinched up into a smile which made it seem still smaller. His superlative get-up harmonized with the sneaky expression of his insipid face. Vergoncey was what is called a coxcomb, and when his measured movements and dull eyes were studied, it was easy to see that he had a great disposition for intrigue. The fact is, this pretended "land-owner" had succeeded in acquiring a very good position in Paris.

He was the son of a great nobleman's steward—the money-lender's remarks on that point were true—and he had an income which would have been sufficient to live on quietly in the country. He was uneducated, destitute of wit or any social accomplishment, and yet he was very well received in the society to be found between the Rue Lafitte and the Bois de Boulogne. He had become the frequent guest of several financial magnates, to whom he had been useful in many ways, and the Brossin mansion was one of those which he most often visited. The baroness had taken him under her wing as it were ; the baron was glad to make use of him when he had to dabble in certain shady affairs, and young Alfred would not have made a bet or bought a pair of trousers without consulting him. Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin was the only inmate of the superb house which her father had erected on the Boulevard Haussmann who dared to turn M. Théodore into ridicule.

As for the Gnat Club's opinion concerning Vergoncey, it varied. The discerning members did not hesitate to remark that this good-looking fellow managed to go everywhere and participate in every bit of amusement without paying his share, and that his antecedents and family connections were "wrapped in mystery ;" however, the majority rather liked his reserve and his English ways. To be brief, the opinions about him were expressed in a phrase of double meaning. "He is very clever."

"Well, my dear fellow," said this phoenix of fops, holding out his hand to Alfred, as the latter entered the smoking-room at Tortoni's, "is the matter settled ?"

Brossin was about to give a true account of his disappointment when a strange emotion checked the words on his lips. He partly hesitated to confess that his attempt had been a failure ; and, besides, a new idea had dawned upon him. "If I make up my mind to sign Noridet's name," he thought, "it isn't worth while to let Vergoncey know anything about the matter." His moral degeneracy was rapidly progressing.

"We did not settle, but it amounts to the same thing," he said, with a careless air. "That Gobseck had put me off till five o'clock to roll out his cash. But I'm as thirsty as a street-sweeper. Waiter, a bottle of Moët's 'Brut Imperial,' a bowl, some sugar, and some lemons ! I am going to prepare a beverage which you must give me your opinion about," he added to Vergoncey.

"With fellows of that sort, my dear Alfred, there's nothing done till all is done."

"I tell you that the thing's settled! That isn't what troubles me, but the paying up on settling day. Do you think that my mother *will* pay up at the end of the six months?" asked young Brossin, with an anxious look.

"No doubt of it, my dear friend, and you know that I shall use all my influence to induce her to do so. She honours me with her confidence, and when I tell her how you are situated—"

"Why, of course, she will not let you pay in my place!" cried Alfred, in the tone of a man who has found an argument beyond discussion.

The rubicon was crossed. Young Brossin, certain now as to the results of the forgery, did not even think of trying to find Noridet. "Here's the bottle; let's break its neck!" exclaimed he, seizing hold of the bottle of champagne which the waiter had just brought. He now had to pour the contents into the silver-plated bowl which had been set before him; but he stopped short in the midst of the interesting operation, for some one had just entered the front room, and Alfred had recognised in a mirror Noridet's astute face and turned-up moustaches. The first impulse is always the best. Seeing Noridet appear when he had renounced all thought of meeting him in Paris, Alfred rose at once to go and speak to him. This unexpected meeting seemingly relieved him of his difficulties so completely that he did not hesitate. But just as he was entering the room in which he had caught sight of Jules, the latter turned his back and quietly went towards the street door.

At this sight, Alfred stopped short and his evil thoughts returned to him. If M. de Mathis's heir vanished like this, it was because he did not wish to enter into any explanation; and, besides, his presence in Paris, after declaring that he was going to Chevreuse, left no doubt as to the nature of his intentions. To go and ask the favour which he had promised in the private room at the Maison d'Or was to expose oneself to an almost certain refusal. There was no possibility of believing otherwise. So to take the money-lender that evening a note bearing Noridet's name, Alfred now had no other course but to counterfeit his signature. So he slowly returned to his seat and began to drink, in order to drown his thoughts. The wary Vergoncey did not ask him the reason of his sudden exit from the smoking-room. He was naturally discreet, and doubly so by calculation. Moreover, he had, perhaps, not noticed Noridet.

"I'll take time to drain this bowl with you," said Brossin, swallowing one glass after another in hot haste, "and then I'm off for the Rue Vanneau. But this evening at seven be at the Café Riche. Argentine has no rehearsal, and she will bring her friend, Fil-de-Soie. Théodore, my dear fellow, I'll stand you a dinner which you will have reason to recollect."

"You'll remember my three thousand francs, won't you, my dear friend?" said the prudent Théodore. "I am waiting for my farm rents to come in, and I shall be short till they are paid up."

Alfred's last scruples vanished amid his carouse. As he went down the steps of Tortoni's he was more than half intoxicated, and quite determined to carry out his evil purpose. He had begun by getting rid of his friend, who, by the way, had no desire to appear on the boulevard in company with an intoxicated man. Then, as soon as he found himself alone, Alfred procured some bill stamps, went into a reading-room and began to fill them in. He had Noridet's letter in his pocket, as M. Ménager had carefully returned it to him. The signature was at the bottom, very legible and easy to imitate. It seemed as though everything conspired to induce this unfortunate fellow to dishonour himself. However, at the moment when

he was penning Noridet's name, he had a final moment's hesitation. He thought of the terrible day when the payment would fall due, and when it would be necessary for him to tell his mother of his debt.

"Bah!" he muttered, "she won't refuse to settle when I tell her that Vergoncey has indorsed the bills, and he won't contradict me, as he thinks that I am going to use his name. Ménager hasn't the shadow of a suspicion. It is to me they'll come in six months' time for the payment, and, as I shall have settled the little matter with my mother, I shall hand over the cash, and no one will suspect me—not even Noridet, who must have been making game of me. Besides all this, a lucky run of cards at the club may settle everything."

This last thought determined him, and he indorsed the notes in Noridet's name. The imitation was successful, and any one would have been deceived by it. Half an hour after this infamous act, Alfred rang at the money-lender's bell. He longed to bring the matter to an end, but a strange sensation seemed to stifle him when he heard M. Ménager coming to open the door. A flash of reason seemed to dart through his brain, and he was, for an instant, tempted to rush down the stairs, and fly from the accursed house.

This touch of honest purpose was the last. The usurer made his appearance, more smiling than before, and Alfred crossed the fatal threshold. "This quick return makes me hope that you have brought good news," said Ménager, graciously, his eyes glittering behind his spectacles.

"Capital! capital! I have had rare good luck, let me tell you! Just fancy Noridet's having delayed his departure till this evening, and my not even having had the trouble to go to his house! I met him on the boulevard; we went to Tortoni's, and he indorsed the notes for me at once."

Young Brossin rattled on to hide his embarrassment, but it would have been apparent to anyone, and Ménager seemed to enjoy letting him chatter without interruption.

"Ah! so much the better," he said at last, turning toward his private room; "we shall settle this matter at once. I confess that the prospect of sending back the money to my country friends was not very agreeable to me; and I am delighted at being able to avoid that unpleasant necessity, and to oblige you at the same time."

When Alfred seated himself near the desk and presented the notes to M. Ménager, he turned very pale and his hands trembled, but the usurer did not appear to notice his agitation. He looked at the indorser's signature, and examined it attentively. "Will you be kind enough to give me the letter which Monsieur Noridet wrote to you this morning?" he said in his softest voice.

Alfred quivered with alarm. "I should like to forward it to the parties who furnish the money," continued the usurer. "You see these people don't know Monsieur Noridet's signature, and they will be glad to have a letter of his in which he clearly declares his intention of lending you his name." Alfred held out the letter with the gesture of a man who does not know what he is about. "That is all, sir, now," said M. Ménager, who placed the letter and the bills in his pocket-book, "I have only to express to you my regret at having obliged you to come twice to this out-of-the-way neighbourhood. Will you be kind enough to count the bank-notes? There are three packages of ten thousand each."

Alfred turned over the flimsies with an uncertain hand, and rose without taking time to put them into his pocket. He was anxious to be gone,

and though his intoxication was entirely over, he tottered when M. Ménager bowed him ceremoniously out. At last the door was closed, and he could be heard going hastily down stairs. "Ah! so the son's matter is attended to," then said the usurer, straightening himself up, "now I must deal with the father!"

V

It was evening. The sun was sinking behind the woods, and its last rays still lingered on the roof of the château of Chevreuse.

Since the burial of M. de Mathis, this smiling abode seemed to have gone into mourning for its owner. The courtyard, once so animated, now remained silent and desolate, and the carefully closed windows gave the front of the house the melancholy look of some tomb. A single window was open on the side overlooking the garden, and admitted the warm air of a mild autumn evening into a little parlour, hung with dark curtains. Three women dressed in mourning sat there looking sadly out upon the beautiful landscape below.

M. de Mathis's widow, reclining in a large arm-chair, was in the centre of the group, and her eyes wandered vaguely over the park, which glittered in the expiring sunlight. At times also they lingered on the pale face of her godchild, who was seated beside her. These eyes of hers alone lived; her motionless body had the stillness of death. Andrée held the paralytic lady's cold right hand between both of her own, and wept silently. The young girl's emaciated features had lost none of their pure beauty, and, indeed, grief had added an inexpressible charm to her intelligent face. Her chaste and flexible figure was clearly defined by her tight-fitting black woollen dress, and in spite of her careless attitude she seemed a picture of elegance and grace. Hers was the perfect type of creole beauty, which becomes positive loveliness when blended with vivacity of countenance and grace of movement. However, a look of saddened dignity dwelt in her large black eyes, and her lips, which formerly smiled so often, now wore an expression of coldness and of resolve. The misfortune which had fallen upon this whilom lively, laughing girl, had made a woman of her. She was but seventeen, but already looked twenty.

Seated near her, there was a lady of over fifty, but who was still very lively in her motions. She was attentively reading a letter. "The more I reflect, my dear child," she said "upon what my husband writes to me, the more unlikely it seems that he will return this week."

The young girl made a gesture expressive of resignation.

"By the date of this letter," resumed the elderly lady, "it is clear that he had not heard of Monsieur de Mathis's death at Berne, and he tells me that he is about to start on an excursion through the Oberland. Who knows whether my letters will reach him at all?"

"Oh! I know Monsieur Mornac's good heart and his devotion," replied Andrée, "and I am sure that he will come here as soon as he hears of our misfortune. Do not vex yourself, dear madame, I beg of you."

"Heaven knows that it is not on my own account," said the elderly lady with youthful vivacity, "but I long to see you in a less painful position, you and my poor friend, who, I hope, can still hear what we say."

"You understand us very well, do you not, godmother?" asked the young girl in a soft voice, as she pressed Madame de Mathis's hand.

By way of reply, the paralytic fixed her eyes tenderly upon Andrée, and the tears trickled down her pale cheeks.

"You tell me that Monsieur de Mathis did not write anything before he died?" said Madame Mornac.

"Alas! he suffered so dreadfully and died so soon that he merely had time to give us his blessing and bid us farewell."

"Well, he must have left a paper somewhere to save you the trouble of going to law. You see, my child, Mornac was a notary for thirty years, and I know all about inheritances. I am easy about the will; my husband dictated it, and as soon as he returns, you will be out of your difficulties; but I should be glad, for Madame de Mathis's sake, if one could avoid the fixture of seals here."

"The fixture of seals?" said Andrée, looking at Madame Mornac with surprise.

"Yes, the seals. It is nothing less than having a magistrate coming, poking about everywhere and putting seals on all the doors and all the cupboards, as if the château were inhabited by thieves."

"Such a thing is impossible!" exclaimed the young girl in amazement.

"On the contrary, nothing is more probable. You do not know what the law is, my dear Andrée, and you are not aware that so far Monsieur de Mathis's only heir is his nephew, Monsieur Jules Noridet, that fine fellow who never came here except to turn honest people into ridicule. He has the right to have seals put all over the house until the will is produced and read."

"Oh, madame," said Andrée, in a reproachful tone, "Jules is incapable of such an act! I am quite sure that my godmother thinks so too."

The eyes of the paralytic assumed a singular expression. They no longer wept, but seemed to threaten. The meaning of this hard stare was so evident that the young girl hastily added: "Godmother is perhaps angry with Jules because he has not been back to see us again, but the poor fellow has been very ill, and the funeral ceremony quite overcame him. Our good doctor told me himself that he was greatly in need of rest."

"That does not prevent him from going about everywhere," said the old lady, sharply. "In the fashionable society which he frequents there is already a report that he has inherited all his uncle's millions. I heard that pretty piece of news yesterday at the Brossins' house. They want to catch Noridet for their hussy of a daughter; however, I let them say on. After all, Switzerland is not so very far off, and my husband will come home some day or other."

André cast so expressive a look at her godmother that the over vivacious Madame Mornac understood her.

"You are right, my dear little pet," said she, "there's no need of paining Madame de Mathis. Let us say no more about Monsieur Jules, but return to business. Monsieur Brias, you say, found nothing in the buhl cabinet in Monsieur de Mathis's study?"

"No, madame. Our dear doctor thought, like you, that there might be some important papers there, but he told me he only found a few unimportant letters."

"That is strange, very strange indeed!" resumed the old lady, fidgetting on her chair. "It seems to me that my husband spoke of a codicil which Monsieur de Mathis must have kept there. There I go again, talking about codicils to you when you do not know what they are! I always forget that one must be a lawyer's wife to understand that jargon. However, I am

now going to make a proposal to you. You know that we have a large house in Paris, and that I am as dull as can be all alone there. Now you ought to come to stay with us there, with your godmother, until this sad affair comes to an end. You will, won't you, my dear girl?"

Andrée was looking at Madame de Mathis, trying to read an answer in her eyes, when the door softly opened.

"What is it, Joseph?" asked the young girl of the servant, who had entered without being rung for.

"Mademoiselle," replied the valet, with ill-concealed reluctance, "some persons have come to put on the seals here. Monsieur Noridet is with them."

Andrée turned very pale, and the impetuous Madame Mornac at once rose to her feet.

"Ah, the rascal!" she cried; "I knew very well that he would soon show himself in his true light! But we will see him, and I'll tell him what I think of him!"

"Madame, my dear madame!" protested the young girl in a tone of entreaty.

"No, my dear pet, no. Things can't go on like that, and it sha'n't be said that Monsieur Noridet shall play the master in this château just because my husband has taken a fancy to go wandering about the Oberland. That was a pretty idea for my poor Mornac to take into his head at his age!"

While the worthy woman uttered this vehement protest, Andrée kept close to her godmother, and Madame de Mathis raised her eyes to heaven with a look of resignation which it was impossible to misunderstand. "See, she shows us what to do," said Andrée, pointing to the paralytic.

"Yes, yes, it is all very well to pray to heaven," said Madame Mornac, more and more excited, "but we must help ourselves a little in this world. You can stay with our poor friend, my dear, while I go to receive these people. Don't be afraid. I know how to talk to them, and I hope that I shall rid you of them all. In the first place, I know all about the law, and this is not the proper time of day to come to put on seals. Now, Joseph, where are these fine gentlemen?"

"In the grand drawing-room, madame," replied the servant, standing aside to let Andrée's ardent friend leave the apartment.

Without further delay, Madame Mornac walked to the drawing-room like a grenadier about to storm a redoubt. It was indeed Jules Noridet who had come to the château. He had not made up his mind to do so without a deal of hesitation. A harsh measure of this kind was calculated to injure him in the eyes of the world. A week had elapsed since the burial of M. de Mathis, and his murderer had had time to reflect upon his singular position. He had devoted all the energies of a strong mind to elucidating the mysterious features of his adventure with M. Lugos, and as he possessed the rare faculty of analysing his own impressions, he had ended by forming an opinion which must needs be near the truth. He thought that the stranger wished to revenge himself upon some one, and vaguely guessed that this some one was a member of the Brossin family. This did not displease him, for he had a personal spite against the baron, which he was only too ready to gratify. Noridet, therefore, resolved to execute the orders of the master that chance had given him; but his apparent resignation hid a plan to which he had given deep thought. M. de Mathis had no other landed property excepting the château at Chevreuse, but his invest-

ments in Government "Rentes" and commercial enterprises amounted to over two millions. His nephew thought that once in possession of the bonds and documents which would enable him to carry off a hundred thousand francs' income in his pocket, he might easily fly from M. Lugos's tyranny. He had made up his mind to leave France if necessary, and to wait in foreign parts till the time of limitation were past.

There remained the question of the will which disinherited him. That this will existed, and was in the stranger's possession, Noridet no longer doubted, for he recalled certain expressions made use of in the document which he had so hastily destroyed on the night of the 2nd September, and he bitterly regretted that he had not heeded them. However, M. Lugos had promised not to bring the will forward unless he disobeyed him, and, in fact, he had even added: "To serve my purpose you must be rich."

Thus Noridet was not ill at ease even as to this point, but he did not wish to lose time, and he determined to take his first measures as presumptive heir. He mistrusted chance, and was very anxious to legally establish his rights. Having arrived at this determination, he set out for Chevreuse, but various delays occurred on the road, and he did not get there till late. He wished to show some degree of courtesy in the disagreeable measures which he was about to take, so he intended to simply call that evening upon his aunt, tell Andrée what he intended to do, sleep in the village near by, and return on the morrow to have the seals affixed.

He was concluding his explanations to the local justice of the peace, who, out of respect, also wished to see Madame de Mathis before proceeding with the matter in hand, when Madame Mornac burst like a whirlwind into the room.

"So it's you, sir, who take upon yourself to bring a justice of the peace into a house whose owner died only a week ago? Do you know that your conduct isn't quite respectful?" To give greater emphasis to her remarks, Madame Mornac crossed her arms and looked straight at the astonished heir. "Yes, you are in a great hurry to secure possession of your uncle's property, and you don't reflect that you may kill your aunt. But you've reckoned without your host, let me tell you, Mister *Heir*!"

Noridet was meanwhile boiling over with rage. "Excuse me, madame," said the justice of the peace, who thought it necessary to interfere, "this gentleman applied to me to proceed with a legal formality of an indispensable kind, and—"

"That's all stuff!" unceremoniously interrupted Madame Mornac. "It may be legal, but it's not indispensable at all, so don't say that! My husband was a notary for thirty years, my dear sir, and he would tell you, like me, that Monsieur Noridet might have spared Madame de Mathis this annoyance. I tell you that it is abominable, and won't bring him luck, that I'll answer for!"

"Am I not speaking to Madame Mornac?" said the magistrate, who had once or twice met the notary's irrepressible wife.

"Herself, in person, sir, and if my husband had not been fool enough to go off to Switzerland, he would have a good deal more to say than I am saying. But just wait! he'll be back very soon, and when he comes, your client there will be sorry for acting as he does."

"Madame," said the magistrate, who was somewhat out of countenance, "I assure you that Monsieur Noridet only came to call on Madame de Mathis."

"A pretty sort of visit, with a justice of peace and his clerk!"

Noridet, in spite of the anger he felt at this unexpected attack, had lost none of his usual acumen, so that what Madame Mornac said startled him. "What can this old lunatic mean by her threats?" he thought.

However, a moment's reflection sufficed to restore his composure, and with studied politeness he replied: "I beg your pardon, madame, for not having recognised you. I have so seldom had the honour of seeing you, that you must overlook my forgetfulness. Will you allow me to explain my intentions to you?"

"No need of that, I know what they are."

"I think not, madame; for, first of all, I wish to beg Madame de Mathis, whatever may be the terms of my uncle's will, to continue residing at the château and to retain the Chevreuse property for life."

"Really, Monsieur Noridet, you mean to do that!" exclaimed the old lady, raising her hands as if to express her admiration.

"That is my firm intention."

"That is very good, young man, very good! Why, you are really better than I thought! Your uncle leaves you three millions, and you are kind enough not to turn your aunt out of doors! That is a noble act, and they will be sure to admire it in the Brossin family."

This last gibe took effect.

"Madame," said Noridet, drily, "it seems to me idle to continue this conversation, and as you think fit to act as Madame de Mathis's bodyguard, I renounce the pleasure of seeing her this evening. I hope that to-morrow I shall not be prevented from seeing my aunt."

"Perhaps you will find obstacles that you little expect, Monsieur Jules!" exclaimed Madame Mornac, as Noridet went towards the door.

The justice, delighted at getting out of the conflict, made a sign to his clerk, and the three visitors were already in the vestibule, when a carriage drawn by four horses suddenly drew up at the gate. Such had been the noise of the quarrel, that no one had heard the bells of the horses' collars or the cracking of the driver's whip.

At the moment when a servant opened the door for Noridet and his companions, a man hastily alighted from his carriage and came up the steps. He wore a flowing travelling cloak and a fur cap, together with a huge woollen comforter. Although his face was half-hidden, his way of coming up the steps showed that he was quite familiar with the château. He indeed entered the vestibule without looking round him, walked straight up to Madame Mornac, flung his arms about her neck and kissed her. The worthy old lady was in such a state of exasperation that at first she did not recognise the traveller, but sprang back to escape his embraces. "It is I, Sidonie, it is I!" said the new-comer, quietly. "Really, it's not worth while to travel two hundred leagues in twenty hours to be received like this!"

"Mornac!" cried the old lady, opening her arms, "you have come at last, then! I've been expecting you for a week."

"But, my dear," replied the new-comer, taking off his comforter, "I could not get here any sooner. Your despatch reached me at Grindelwald—just fancy! and was handed to me on the upper glacier, where there are no mail coaches unfortunately!"

"The deuce fly away with the upper glacier! I want to know if there is any sense in running about among the mountains like that, when you're over sixty years old, and are badly wanted here?"

"I will explain to you, my dear! In the Oberland, you see—"

"Never mind ! never mind ! we've something else to do besides talk about Switzerland now. We must go back into the drawing-room with these gentlemen ; it will save them the trouble of returning again," said Madame Mornac, emphasizing her last words.

The visitors, who had stopped in the vestibule, looked on the scene without saying a word. The justice had recognised the old notary as a man whom he greatly respected, and was waiting for an opportunity to greet him. Noridet, also, had recognised M. Mornac, and his sudden return revived the apprehensions he had felt at the old lady's remarks. He had a vague presentiment of coming trouble. Madame Mornac did not leave him time for reflection, however, but in the tone of a colonel presenting his officers to an inspector-general, she successively introduced the three visitors to her husband : "Monsieur Maillard, Justice of the Peace of this district ; you already saw him here this summer."

"I remember him perfectly, and am delighted to meet him again."

"The gentleman over there is his clerk," continued the old lady, without giving her husband time to exchange any compliments with the magistrate. "I need not introduce you to Monsieur Jules Noridet," she added, "you know him already."

M. Mornac's face clouded slightly as he recognised M. de Mathis's nephew ; however, he gave Noridet his hand.

"Joseph, bring a light ! Gentlemen, step into the drawing-room," resumed Madame Mornac, leading the way.

This off-hand invitation met with no objection. Noridet, surprised and annoyed, was too anxious to clear up matters to refuse. The magistrate and the retired notary, who did not exactly understand what was afoot, mechanically followed.

On entering the drawing-room the traveller removed his wraps, displaying a mild countenance, with grey hair, and close-shaven cheeks. It was enough to look at his kind and honest face to understand what sort of man he was. In fact, he was as quiet as his wife was lively, though this had not prevented them from agreeing perfectly well during their thirty years of married life, perhaps because the notary had willingly allowed himself to be governed by his better half.

"You have effected a long journey in very little time," said the justice of the peace when they were all seated.

"That is true, and I confess that I am quite worn out," replied M. Mornac, leaning back with an air of relief in his arm-chair. "As soon as I heard the sad news I set out, and when I reached Paris by rail, I at once ordered horses, and posted here in all haste. My wife told me in her telegram not to lose a moment, but to bring at once the—"

"You did not forget what I told you to bring, I hope ?" interrupted the old lady.

"No, certainly not, my dear. I went to our house expressly to fetch it. But what a terrible calamity ! How did our friends fall victims to such an accident ? I know almost nothing about it. Telegrams are so unsatisfactory !"

"Oh ! You will soon hear all about the poisoning. Business is in question just now, and I will tell you everything in three words," said Madame Mornac. "Monsieur Noridet is in a great hurry to secure possession of his uncle's property, so he came here this evening with the justice of the peace to have the seals put on. That is all ; I think that you have arrived just in time."

The old notary's face expressed the greatest surprise. Noridet, who was very pale, looked at him steadily as if trying to read his thoughts in his eyes, and spoke without showing the least embarrassment. "Monsieur Mornac knows enough about law," said he, "to be aware that my proceedings are quite natural and very simple."

"Monsieur Noridet intends to show the greatest consideration for Madame de Mathis," said the justice of the peace, who, from the nature of his office and his natural disposition, always inclined toward peace and good understanding.

"I regret," said M. Mornac, timidly, "that Monsieur Noridet should have been in such a hurry. It would, perhaps, have been better—"

"I lost my uncle ten days ago," interrupted Noridet, who had gradually recovered his composure at sight of the old notary's hesitation, "and if I had been as eager as I am represented to be—quite wrongly, I must say—this formality would long ago have been accomplished."

"Yes," stammered M. Mornac, "certainly; the heir-presumptive has a right to have the seals affixed—when there is no will."

"That is precisely our case," said the justice of the peace. "Monsieur de Mathis has apparently not left any legal expression of his last wishes."

Madame Mornac listened with visible satisfaction to these various remarks, and Noridet detected an expression of malignant joy in her eyes. There was a moment's silence. The worthy notary looked extremely uncomfortable and those who knew him could guess why he hesitated to speak out. He had a perfect horror of paining any one, and although he did not like M. de Mathis's nephew, he felt annoyed at having to shatter his hopes of inheritance. However his wife having sufficiently enjoyed her triumph in silence, now saw fit to strike the decisive blow. "Come!" she said, abruptly, to her husband, "why do you let the magistrate tire himself with useless talk. You know all about Monsieur de Mathis's intentions, don't you?"

"Certainly, my dear. He told me what they were more than two years ago."

"Well, then, state what they were instead of letting these gentlemen talk to no purpose."

"Whatever they were, sir," said Noridet who misunderstood the meaning of these words, "I shall carry them out as rigidly as though my uncle had indicated them in writing."

"He has done so," said the notary, raising his voice.

"That is impossible!" involuntarily exclaimed the heir-presumptive.

"Monsieur de Mathis has left a will, then?" asked the justice of the peace in surprise.

"Yes, dated May 1st, 1865."

"I would observe, sir," said Noridet, in a tone of ill-suppressed anger, "that my uncle's two lawyers in Paris and at Chevrecuse have no knowledge whatever of any such document."

"That is quite simple. He never spoke to any one but me about it, and—"

"It is not sufficient for him to have spoken to you about it," interrupted Noridet angrily. "For a will to be worth anything it must be produced."

"Here it is," quietly replied M. Mornac, taking a large grey envelope from his pocket.

The scene which followed upon the production of this envelope was a fit subject for a painter. Madame Mornac was triumphant. Her delight was

such that she could not keep still. The justice of the peace stared at the envelope with undisguised astonishment, while as for the retired notary, he remained with lowered eyes, like a man who, having dealt a fatal blow, wishes to avoid sight of its effect.

But, of all the faces, Noridet's was a study. All the passions of his heart were to be detected on his contracted features. Wounded pride, futile cupidity, anger especially; cold, concentrated anger had so altered his face as to make it positively hideous. He was no longer merely pale, he was ghastly. Singularly enough, what caused him the most suffering was the thought of having been trifled with by M. Lugos. "The scoundrel!" muttered Jules, "he had the audacity to tell me that he had the will!"

When Madame Mornac had sufficiently enjoyed her triumph, she spoke in a milder tone than before. The lawyer's talkative wife was in reality a good-hearted woman, and she began to feel that M. de Mathis's nephew had been sufficiently punished.

"Come, Mornac," said she to her husband, "say something instead of sitting there like a statue. Explain to Monsieur Jules that his uncle did not forget him. There's a broad margin between three millions and nothing at all."

"Certainly, my dear! Poor Mathis frequently told me that there was a codicil."

"Which has not been found so far, though it will be found eventually, no doubt," added the old lady.

"Excuse me, sir," said Noridet, who knew all about the paper which was missing, "I had personal reasons for believing that my uncle had not left a will, and I should like to know under what circumstances he confided to you the paper which you now produce in a manner which, to say the least, is very unexpected."

"That is very easy to understand," said M. Mornac, without showing any offence at this almost insulting question. "My poor friend was born and bred at Mauritins, as you know, and he had little knowledge of French law. He was afraid that his will might not be in legal form, and so he asked me to tell him how to draw it up."

"Then it was you, sir, who took the trouble to write this will? No one could be more obliging," said Noridet, with a hither smile.

"I beg your pardon," mildly replied the old notary, "I only dictated the general terms."

"However, you are aware of its contents?"

"Of course. I remember the occasion as though it were yesterday. Mathis had dined with me, and we arranged everything in my private office. He even wrote the will out twice, and, after throwing the first copy, with which he was dissatisfied, into the waste paper basket, he signed the other one and placed it in this envelope. I hoped that I should never be called upon to open it, indeed, I expected to leave this life long before he did," added M. Mornac, with a sigh.

"That is all very well, sir," said Noridet, drily, "since my uncle saw fit to confide his intentions to a stranger, I have only to ask you to acquaint me with them."

"I am ready to do so, this very evening, if you wish it."

"Would it not be better," now said the justice of the peace, "to defer the reading of the will until to-morrow? Madame de Mathis can then be present. It is very late, and I fear—"

"You are perfectly right," interrupted Madame Mornac. "Besides, my poor husband needs rest."

"The truth is," said the ex-notary, "that two hundred leagues, part by rail, and part by coach—"

"To-morrow, then," interrupted Noridet, rising. And, bowing coldly, he went towards the door, Madame Mornac shouting after him: "At noon precisely, upstairs in the green parlour! It would tire your aunt too much to come downstairs!"

The justice of the peace took leave more politely, and went off, followed by his clerk.

As long as Noridet had been in presence of his antagonists, he had restrained himself; but when he had crossed the threshold of the house, of which he had fancied himself the master, he felt his knees give way beneath him, and was obliged to lean against the wall for support. The darkness, fortunately, hid his weakness from his companions, and he walked on towards the village without uttering a word that betrayed his agitation. He walked in a jerky fashion, and the worthy justice said nothing, for fear of adding fresh anger to what appeared natural distress.

At this moment Noridet's heart leapt with a wild desire to kill M. Lugos. The structure of his fortune, erected at the cost of so many crimes, had just crumbled away before his eyes. Revenge alone remained to him. "This man," thought he, "has played an infamous farce, and after tricking me in the most rascally manner, he presumes to think himself master of my actions. No! no! I will take his life rather than allow him to govern mine!"

There was no further illusion to be indulged in. The will which the stranger had declared was in his possession, was really in that of M. Mornac, and the ex-notary's manner plainly indicated that M. de Mathis had disinherited him. But this was not all. The stranger still held the threat of punishment above him, and as Noridet crossed the wood through which he had accompanied the funeral procession, he saw the scaffold rise before him in the shadows of the night.

Fortunately, the walk was a short one. The party reached the village in half-an-hour, and Noridet left his companions and repaired to the inn where he had engaged a room.

As he entered the common hall, he saw that preparations were being made for supper. This apartment served as a kitchen and dining-room. A bright fire blazed, lighting up the andirons, above which there was a turnspit. At the other end of the room there was a round table, on which a white tablecloth lay neatly spread. "Do you wish to have supper at once, sir?" asked the innkeeper, putting his hand to his cap.

"Yes," replied Noridet, curtly.

"It is quite ready, and if you will sit down I will serve you, sir." Noridet was about to do so, when he noticed that places were laid for two. "I thought that you would prefer not to eat alone," said the innkeeper, "and we have a very respectable gentleman staying here."

Under any other circumstances the nephew of M. de Mathis would have scorned the proposal to dine with anyone, but he was too much absorbed in thought to take much notice of what was going on around him. "No matter," said he, "if you will merely attend to me at once."

"The gentleman is upstairs and I will go and tell him to come down. But no, it isn't necessary I see, for here he comes!"

The person mentioned now walked into the room. Noridet did not turn

his head, and the stranger took a scat in front of him without receiving any salutation in return for the bow he made. "Good evening, sir," he said in a voice which made Noridet start.

The young fellow looked up and was amazed to see M. Lugos, for the new-comer was the mysterious stranger in person, as calm and as polite as on the day when he had first seen him. "I am glad," continued Lugos, with perfect ease, "that chance has brought us both to this village to-night."

"Ah! you know each other, gentlemen," said the innkeeper with a laugh.

"Yes, I have had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman in Paris," said the new-comer, "and I hope that you are going to give us a good supper."

"Be easy as to that, sir; my sign says: 'Here friends meet.'"

"Very good, my worthy man, do your best."

Noridet at this moment was far from sharing the majestic calmness of M. Lugos, but such was his power over himself, that he was able to command his tongue. "I did not expect, sir," he said, "to see you here, but since I have this opportunity of speaking to you, I shall be glad to avail myself of it."

"Very good! I have some excellent cigars upstairs, and after supper, if you will come into my room, we shall have plenty of time to chat. Will that suit you?"

"Quite so," said Noridet, who could not help turning pale on hearing his enemy propose a private interview.

"Come, my dear sir, let us set to! I am hungry," rejoined M. Lugos.

The soup which was smoking upon the table was followed by a brace of partridges. The stranger ate with a good appetite and did almost all the talking. Noridet said and ate but little. Strange to say, he grew duller and duller as the meal progressed, whilst the good humour of M. Lugos seemed to increase. At dessert, the stranger's gaiety was so evident, and he laughed so heartily, that Noridet thought it a good opportunity to remind him of his proposition. They both rose, and M. Lugos went first to show the way.

"I have forgot my gloves," said Noridet just as the innkeeper, light in hand, was going up the stairs after the stranger; and with this remark the young fellow returned into the dining-room. It was dark, and the two female servants of the inn had fallen asleep near the fire. Jules took off the table a sharp, well pointed knife, and hid it in the side-pocket of his coat.

"Are you coming, my dear sir?" called M. Lugos.

"Here I am. I have found what I had lost," replied Noridet, going quickly towards the stair-case.

"Confess that you did not expect to meet me here," said M. Lugos, when he and Noridet were alone in the former's room.

"I do not suppose that mere chance brought you here," replied Noridet, with a dark look.

"Chance! I don't believe in chance, my dear sir. Nothing happens in this world without a cause, and our meeting this evening results from events which I directed."

"Then it is to you that I owe the result I met with at the château?"

M. Lugos bowed without replying.

"You told me that my uncle's will was in your hands," resumed Noridet with increasing anger, "and now it proves to be in those of a fool."

"You are not very polite as regards poor Monsieur Mornac," said the stranger, smiling.

"Let us have no more jokes, sir!" retorted Noridet. "I now know what to think of your promises; and you will allow me to consider myself free from mine."

"Did you keep yours?" quietly asked M. Lugos.

"You have not asked anything of me, and I have done nothing."

"On the contrary, you have done a great deal, and I will in a few words tell you how you have employed your time. Allow me to close this window before I do so. It overlooks the garden, and there is a vine against the wall which might serve as a ladder for curious persons, as well as for robbers."

While the stranger was closing the casement, Noridet fumbled in his pocket to feel the knife and ascertain whether it could be easily drawn when required.

"I was saying," resumed M. Lugos, "that you had already broken your promises, and I will prove it. In the first place, you saw fit to spy upon me. It did you no good, however, and I hope that you will not be tempted to act in that way again. It is none the less true, however, that by acting in that way you have given me the right to punish you."

"To punish me!" repeated Noridet, livid with rage.

"Yes, to punish you; and so, as regards the disappointment you have just met with, you have no cause to complain. But I pass on to a greater misdemeanour than your attempt to spy upon me. Why did you refuse to accept the invitation which the Baroness Brossin so politely sent you by her son?"

If Noridet had believed in the devil, he would certainly have concluded that M. Lugos had made a pact with Satan. This strange man knew everything, and guessed everything.

"You may possibly have forgotten what I said to you at the end of our interview," resumed M. Lugos. "Remember that I do not believe in useless talk. I therefore advise you, for the future, to listen attentively whenever I have the pleasure of speaking to you."

"Indeed," said Noridet, deeply wounded in his pride, "then I am to follow any instructions which you may have the kindness to give me, and execute them punctually, and even to thank you for letting my uncle's fortune be taken away from me?"

"Excuse me, my dear sir," coldly replied M. Lugos, "you altogether overlook the real point at issue. Whether you inherit from Monsieur de Mathis or not depends upon me; but, millionaire or beggar, you will still be a poisoner."

Noridet writhed in his seat, and he again fumbled for the knife.

"That is what I shall not forget, and it places you entirely in my power, and you so well understand that such is the case, that if you could kill me, you would not hesitate doing so for a moment."

"Yes," said Noridet, hissing the words through his teeth, "if you would stand up with me sword in hand, Monsieur Lugos, I would gladly kill you, but I suppose that you don't care to fight."

"With you? Certainly not. Your life is too valuable to me. But there is no question of a duel. I am talking of a regular murder, carefully planned and rapidly executed, one of those crimes which you understand how to arrange."

Noridet made a motion as if about to rise.

"This evening, for instance, we are alone in this room. The innkeeper is in bed. The garden is deserted, and the window closes badly. If I were found here dead, to-morrow morning, killed by a knife, and if my purse and watch were missing, do you suppose that the rich nephew of Monsieur de Mathis, who slept, we will say, in the next room, would be accused? A few branches broken on the vine, a little moist earth on the carpet, that would be enough to cause all the tramps in the country to be arrested in your place."

The expression of Noridet's face had become frightful. The presence of this man who seemed to read his thoughts, oppressed him like some terrible nightmare. He made up his mind to strike. "It would be easily done," resumed the stranger. "I rise, let us say, for some reason or other—suppose we say to take those cigars off that table. You come stealthily up behind me, and just as I stoop, you strike."

As M. Lugos spoke, he suited his actions to his words. He slowly walked towards a little table near the window, and turned his back upon Noridet, who followed him, knife in hand. "Fortunately," continued the imperturbable stranger, without deigning to look behind him, "fortunately I have my precautions, in case I might die in such a manner." And leaning over the table he selected some superb Havanas in a Russian-leather case.

When he turned round, Noridet had resumed his seat, and sat motionless.

"I was saying, my dear sir," resumed M. Lugos, offering him a cigar, "that I have made various arrangements, thanks to which I have nothing to fear. I have a friend to whom I confide my important papers, and if that friend did not hear from me during twenty-four hours, he would go to the public prosecutor and communicate certain matters to him, which would enable the authorities to connect my death with other events, as yet but little known. Oh! it would be a truly 'celebrated case' such as the papers would turn to good account, I assure you!"

A somewhat long spell of silence followed this scene, which the stranger had enacted with perfect coolness. Noridet once more felt conquered.

"What do you want of me?" he said at last, in a hoarse voice. "The fortune which you promised me belongs to others, while I belong to you."

"I always keep my promises. I told you that to serve me it was necessary you should be rich."

"Rich with such alms as Madame de Mathis may consent to dole out to me," said Noridet bitterly.

"Who says anything about your aunt and your uncle's inheritance? I don't need those millions to insure the execution of my purposes."

"Then it is you who—"

"I have nothing more to tell you to-night. Have faith and wait."

"Wait!" said Noridet, in an ironical tone.

"You will not have to wait long, I assure you. Now, before we part, listen to me attentively. As soon as you return to Paris, call upon the Baroness Brossin, and tell her that you accept her invitation. She is going, next week, with her daughter, to her château at Monville. You must join these ladies in Normandy, and there await my orders, which I have already told you will not be difficult to obey. As for money matters, they will be settled before you leave Paris—upon one condition, however."

"What is that?" asked Noridet anxiously.

"On condition that you do not follow me in the street," replied M. Lugos laughing.

"I suppose that it is needless for me to be present at the opening of my uncle's will to-morrow?"

"It is indispensable, on the contrary. People would form a strange opinion of you if you failed in respect to the memory of Monsieur de Mathis."

"Shall I see you again to-morrow?" asked Noridet, now rising to go.

"Perhaps," rejoined M. Lugos, gravely.

VI.

ON the morrow, at noon precisely, in the green parlour chosen by Madame Mornac, six persons sat round a table awaiting the reading of M. de Mathis's will. Andrée was near the paralytic woman, who, still as motionless as ever, occupied a large arm-chair. Noridet sat opposite to them and lowered his eyes whenever his aunt fixed hers with a keen, searching look upon his face. He was now as calm as he had been disturbed on the evening before, and the justice of the peace admired his demeanour. Even the ex-notary was obliged to confess that, for a disinherited man, Jules behaved fairly well, and he reproached himself for having judged the young fellow over harshly. It is true that Noridet's secret reasons for indifference could not be guessed at by anyone. Who would have thought that, comforted by the new promises of M. Lugos, he was consoling himself for losing M. de Mathis's millions because he believed that he would receive others from another source? He had made up his mind to bear his position like an intelligent man, and to feign disinterestedness, since he could not do otherwise. This course was a clever one; for those who had blamed him already began to pity him. Madame Mornac alone did not appear to be convinced of his sincerity. She watched him askance, and his resignation seemed to her too surprising to be natural.

The moment for the perusal came at last, and the notary placed the envelope containing the will before him. He had assumed a solemn air for the occasion, and before breaking the seal he thought fit to make a few preliminary remarks. "I beg you all," he said, with some embarrassment, "to believe that I did not influence Monsieur de Mathis in any way when he drew up the will which I am about to read to you. The advice which I gave him was merely connected with the form of the document, and my poor friend disposed of his fortune freely and according to his own wishes."

"No one here, sir," said Noridet, "has the slightest doubt of your good faith." He had perfectly well understood the meaning of this preliminary speech, and as the chance was a good one to win the favourable opinion of all present, he took care to profit by it.

"Come, Mornac," said the old lady, "you always think that you are still a notary, and you make speeches instead of reading. There is no occasion for preamble."

"I quite agree with Madame Mornac," said Noridet, "and as regards whatever may relate to me, I am ready to obey my uncle's wishes, whatever they are."

A murmur of approbation followed this remark, and M. Mornac began to open the envelope. From a lingering, law-like habit, he took care, before breaking the seal, to show that the Mathis crest was firmly imprinted in the wax. He then methodically unfolded a sheet of paper contained in the envelope, and in a trembling voice began to read as follows:

“ ‘Being of sound mind and body, and having long reflected as to the disposal of my property, I declare this to be my last will and testament. I will and bequeath to Marguerite de Lormier, my beloved wife, in gratitude for the affection which she has ever shown me, all the estate, land, and personality of which I may die possessed, and this upon the following conditions—’ ”

Having reached this point, the ex-notary made a slight pause, and could not refrain from glancing stealthily at Noridet. The disinherited man remained calm and composed. Not a muscle of his face had moved. So M. Mornac continued more boldly :

“ ‘That Mademoiselle Andrée Salazie, whom my wife has brought up from her infancy, and whom we have always loved as our own child, shall be paid the sum of five hundred thousand francs out of the estate, free of all incumbrance and legacy duty.’ ”

At this passage Madame Mornac could not resist the desire to kiss Andrée, who was weeping bitterly ; and the justice of the peace, looking at Madame de Mathis, detected a flash of joy in her eyes.

The ex-notary then, with some hesitation, resumed : “ ‘My nephew, Jules Noridet, the son of my deeply regretted sister, Constance de Mathis, having a personal fortune sufficient for his social position, I do not now bequeath him any portion whatever of my property, but I enjoin my wife to carry out, as regards his future, certain arrangements which I have explained to her, and which she is well acquainted with. I declare before heaven that in trusting my dear Marguerite with the duty of providing for my nephew’s future welfare, I believe I am acting like an honest man, and I have a firm hope that Jules will thank me later on for having kept a fortune in reserve for him.’ ”

However proof Noridet might be against emotion, he could not help feeling a thrill as he listened to this paragraph, which clearly revealed his uncle’s true intentions. By delaying the time when he, Noridet, would inherit the bulk of the fortune, the good old man had only thought of preserving him from total ruin. For an instant, transient indeed, Noridet regretted his crime. But pride soon stifled his passing remorse, and when the ex-notary raised his voice again, the poisoner’s face had resumed its mask of indifference.

“ ‘I choose as my executor my old and excellent friend, Monsieur Mornac, and I beg of him to accept in remembrance of me my library and a diamond I possess worth fifty thousand francs.’ ”

In reading this last sentence, the notary had been obliged to turn the leaf. And now he abruptly turned very pale. His voice died away, his hands began to tremble convulsively, he dropped the paper, and his head sunk upon his breast. Madame Mornac thought that he had an apoplectic stroke, and darted towards him, putting her arms around his neck. “ ‘Speak, speak to me ! ’ ” she exclaimed.

The justice of the peace also rose to help the unfortunate notary, and Andrée let go of her godmother’s hand. Noridet alone did not stir, but gazed with a frown upon this incomprehensible scene. At last, M. Mornac cast a look of despair at Madame de Mathis, and stammered out incoherent words, pointing to the paper spread before him.

“ ‘The will,’ murmured he, “ ‘the will is not signed ! ’ ”

“ ‘But then it is worthless ! ’ ” cried the justice of the peace.

“ ‘What ! ’ ” exclaimed Madame Mornac. “ ‘That is impossible—you would have seen—’ ”

"Mathis copied the will twice," interrupted the ex-notary in a broken voice; "he made a mistake; he put the unsigned draft into the envelope, and must have thrown the signed copy into the waste-paper basket. It is my fault!" continued M. Mornac, striking his forehead with a gesture of despair; "it is my fault! I ought to have paid attention, and have verified this accursed copy myself."

"Come, let us see!" said Madame Mornac, who never entirely lost her self-possession; "explain yourself more clearly. I do not understand anything of all this talk about copies and waste-paper baskets."

"It is easy enough to understand. Monsieur de Mathis came to our house in the evening, and we remained closeted together in my private room to draw up this unlucky will. I can see him now, as he sat at my desk, recopying the rough draft which I had dictated in the first place. When he had finished, he read it over again, and signed it, and I remember that he asked me if it was all perfectly correct. He had before him two sheets of stamped paper, both of the same size, both with a similar amount of writing upon them—one which he had just signed, and the other, alas! the one which I have here. At that moment you, my dear, came to the door of the room, and called to us. Madame de Mathis had just arrived, and was waiting for us in the drawing-room. My poor friend got up, took one of the sheets of paper, and put it into the envelope, crumpled the other in his hand, and threw it among my waste papers, in a large basket placed under the desk. Unfortunately, he sealed up the wrong copy," added the notary, with a deep sigh.

It was now Madame Mornac's turn to give way to despair. When she heard her husband speak of the mistake which had resulted, perhaps, from her disturbing him and M. de Mathis in the office on the evening when the will was drawn up, she could not control herself. "What! I also!" she cried: "I also helped to ruin my friends! It is impossible that it should all end like this! The will is here, entirely in Monsieur de Mathis's handwriting; these are his wishes and they ought to be respected. The signature isn't everything, and it could be proved in court that—"

"Oh, as to that," interrupted the justice of the peace, "there is nothing to hope, and you must know enough about business, madame, to see that this will is null and void."

"That is true, and I must be getting crazy," said Madame Mornac, quite abashed at having for a moment supported such an erroneous view of the law.

"There is perhaps one course open," timidly suggested the justice of the peace, "perhaps you might find the copy signed by Monsieur de Mathis, and thrown by mistake into the waste paper basket. If it exists, it would be perfectly valid."

"To find it again when two years and a half have elapsed," sighed the notary, "that would be utterly impossible."

"Especially as Jean, your man-servant, has a way of selling all your waste papers," interrupted his wife.

While all this talk was going on between the married pair and the justice of the peace, the three remaining witnesses did not mingle in the conversation. Andrée had not taken her eyes off her god-mother, and seemed indifferent to the incredible fatality which deprived her of a fortune. Madame de Mathis, still as ever, motionless and mute, gazed at the young girl with loving eyes as though she were asking her pardon for having brought misfortune upon her. As for Noridet, he succeeded in keeping silent. At the

ex-notary's first exclamation he had realised that the will was null and void, and that this unexpected accident entitled him to the millions of M. de Mathis. The widow had no claim, as she and the deceased had been married under the separate property arrangement, so that she would have to content herself with her modest jointure.

"At last I'm rich," Noridet thought, "Monsieur Lugos has kept his promise."

He silently enjoyed his happiness and his revenge. The château which he had left on the evening before, after such bitter disappointment, was really his own, and those who had mocked him now hung their heads. But he concealed his feelings of elation, and waited for the defeated parties to speak the first. It was, as usual, lively Madame Mornac who opened hostilities. "Do you know that you're a very lucky fellow, Monsieur Jules?" she said in a rough tone.

"I am lucky enough to be the nephew of Monsieur de Mathis," replied Jules. "I do not know that I am lucky in any other respect."

"Indeed! isn't this will, which your uncle forgot to sign, one of those accidents which only happen to—"

"Excuse me, madame," interrupted Noridet, coldly, "I did not come here to listen to your insults, and I wish to finish all this as soon as possible."

"Our meeting has no further purpose," said M. Mornac, "and, from this moment, sir, in the absence of any valid will left by Monsieur de Mathis, you can take possession of his property."

"There is no disputing that," added the justice of the peace.

"Then, gentlemen," said Noridet, "you will kindly allow me to retire. I fear that my presence is painful to my aunt, and I am at least certain that it is very disagreeable to Madame Mornac."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied the old lady with great dignity. "I regret that my dear friends should have lost a fortune which they had every right to expect, but I have no reason to object to your presence. I even feel sure that the nephew of Monsieur de Mathis, the heir to all his property, will act as he ought towards his benefactor's widow."

Noridet bowed coldly but without saying a word, and the ex-notary vainly scanned his face to find out what his intentions might be. His silence was so strange and seemed to conceal such evil designs that Madame Mornac could not refrain from adding, in a louder voice: "No matter what may happen," and she looked towards her husband as she spoke, "I am glad to be able to inform you, Monsieur Jules, that Madame de Mathis and Mademoiselle Andrée have consented to accept our hospitality, and do not need any one's help."

Noridet bowed again and rose to go, still without a word. The justice of the peace and M. Mornac noted with mingled surprise and fear, the strange system of silence which the new heir had so suddenly adopted, and the same thought occurred to both of them. "He intends to revenge himself for the agonies he has endured, and will be implacable as regards his aunt," fancied the worthy notary.

Andrée's large limpid eyes turned to Jules with a look of pity, mingled with reproach. Madame de Mathis, however, averted her gaze as if she dreaded looking at her nephew.

Noridet's departure brought the singular scene to a close. He shook hands with the justice of the peace, and left the room. He longed to be alone and to enjoy his triumph, as well as form a plan of conduct.

At the moment when he was crossing the vestibule, Joseph, his aunt's servant, handed him a letter which the village postman had just brought. Noridet recognised the handwriting at once, broke the seal, and eagerly read these few lines :

"You see that I always keep my promises. You are now rich ; do not forget that you would become poor if the other copy of the will were ever produced. That copy, signed by your uncle, is in the hands of a man who has a right to count on your implicit obedience."

VII.

AN hour had elapsed since Noridet's departure from the château, the justice of the peace had taken his leave, and the notary, broken down with fatigue and excitement, had gone to take the rest he so much needed. However, Madame Mornac, courageous and devoted as ever, had not left her two friends ; in fact, in view of trying to console them, she affected a gaiety which she was far from feeling.

"Come, now, my dear girl," said she, affectionately pressing Andrée's hand, "I knew that Providence would not refuse me a boon which I have prayed for so long. I have no sister left me, I have never had a daughter, and now I find both." And, without waiting for an answer, the worthy woman continued, with her usual vivacity : "It is all settled. I have ordered horses for to-morrow morning. Your godmother shall have our old coach, which is as easy as a sedan-chair. I have telegraphed to Paris for your rooms to be made ready, and we shall be there by dinner-time to-morrow."

The young girl looked with sorrowful emotion at her new protectress, but her grief was still too great for her to express her gratitude in words.

"If you could only guess how comfortable you will be !" resumed Madame Mornac. "You will have the pavilion at the end of the garden all to yourselves. A hothouse in which my husband grows all the plants in creation, is right under your windows. Your godmother's arm-chair can be wheeled there on fine winter days, and we can embroider while we sit beside her. We shall cure her, you'll see ! and next summer we will all go together to Switzerland, as Mornac says it is such a wonderful country."

The good woman's imagination, over-excited by the desire of consoling her two friends, was about to conjure up additional pictures of future happiness, when the man-servant, Joseph, came in with a card, and asked if the ladies were willing to receive a visitor. A call that day at the château was quite unexpected, and Madame Mornac read the name of the stranger who thus presented himself, without being able to understand the motive of his visit. "Mademoiselle," said Joseph, turning to Andrée, "it is the gentleman who prescribed for Madame de Mathis on the day of the accident."

The young girl's face lit up, and the eyes of the paralytic blazed with delight.

"Oh, madame !" cried Andrée, "it is the foreign doctor to whom we owe my dear godmother's life, and see by her eyes how glad she will be to see him."

"I also am glad," exclaimed Madame Mornac, "to see the gentleman who saved my old friend ! Bring him in, Joseph, bring him in !"

The servant appeared embarrassed, and made no haste to obey. "What is the matter, Joseph?" asked the young girl.

"Why, the gentleman, mademoiselle, asked if you were alone with Madame de Mathis; he wishes to see you both, quite alone it seems."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the notary's wife, "that is too bad! What difference can it make to the doctor if I am in the room?"

Andrée did not reply, and Madame Mornac was about to give orders to send the indiscreet stranger away when her eyes met those of Madame de Mathis. There was so visible an ecstacy in the sick woman's eyes that Madame Mornac, though somewhat surprised, immediately relented.

"If my poor friend wishes to see him," said she, "there's no harm in it. A doctor is always a serious man, and as your godmother will be present, my dear Andrée, there can be no impropriety in his seeing you. Joseph, shew the gentleman up stairs."

Madame de Mathis's eyes thanked Madame Mornac and a tear trickled down her cheek.

"I must go to see my poor husband now, so it is all right," said Madame Mornac. "He is so upset by all this business that he is really in worse health even than we women. I'll see you again soon," she added, as she left the room by a side door.

"Monsieur Lugos," announced Joseph, as he ushered in the visitor a moment later.

Pale, and clad in black as though in mourning, the stranger slowly advanced towards Andrée, who had risen to receive him, and bowed to her with politeness, akin to affection. It was the mysterious stranger who held Noridet's life and fortune in his power, but he no longer seemed the same as when he exercised a fascinating power over the guilty man, when his mouth only opened to indulge in sarcasm and threat. His energetic countenance seemed transfigured. The hard lines of his marked features appeared soft as if under the influence of different thoughts. His deep-set, fixed eyes which had terrified the poisoner, now had an expression of strange sweetness.

"How happy I am, sir," said the young girl, "to be able to thank you! I have never forgotten you in my prayers," she added, holding out her hand to the stranger with a gesture full of grace and cordiality.

M. Lugos turned paler still and remained for a few seconds without speaking, as if under the influence of strong emotion. "Mademoiselle," said he, pressing Andrée's proffered hand, "if I had looked for any reward for the care which I bestowed upon Madame de Mathis, I should already be recompensed beyond my hopes, as you have not forgotten me."

Andrée blushed, and the stranger undoubtedly realised that the young girl might mistake the feeling which had caused his voice to tremble, for he bowed respectfully and then approached Madame de Mathis.

The paralytic woman's eyes, the living mirror of her soul, had not expressed either curiosity or surprise as she listened to M. Lugos. It seemed as though she were waiting for something to follow. Lugos took Madame de Mathis's hand and kissed it, and Andrée thought that he repressed a tear. "Oh, sir," said she, with a gesture of supplication, "can you restore her health as you restored her life?"

"Alas! mademoiselle, I can as yet only say one word, but it is: 'hope.'"

"You will at least promise not to desert her, to see her again?"

"I swear to you that everything that can be done to cure Madame de

Mathis shall be done ; but time is more powerful than any remedy I have in my possession."

"You cannot do anything to-day, then?" said Andrée, sadly. "When I saw you it seemed to me that my dear godmother was about to be saved anew."

"To-day, mademoiselle," said the stranger, gravely, "I did not come to see Madame de Mathis ; I came to see you."

"To see me?" repeated the young girl, instinctively drawing nearer to the paralytic.

"Yes, mademoiselle, I am charged with a mission confided to me by my best friend, and I am anxious to fulfil it. Excuse me if I come to the point at once. Here is a state bond representing an income of twenty-five thousand francs, which belongs to you."

"To me, sir? You are mistaken," said Andrée, in a tone of offended dignity. "My mother is dead, and I do not own any property whatever."

"I am not mistaken, mademoiselle," quietly insisted the stranger.

"I will add, sir, that I have never given any one the right to compel me to accept liberality the source and motive of which I don't know."

"No one? not even your father?"

"My father!" stammered the young girl, turning pale; "my father would not know where I was, even were he alive."

"It is he who sent me," said M. Lugos.

"My father is dead, sir," replied Andrée, firmly. "If he still lived I should not need any one to defend me from an insulting offer."

"Do not say that without proof," said M. Lugos, quietly.

There was such genuine feeling in the stranger's voice, that the young girl grew calmer.

"Oh, sir," she resumed, "you who saved my godmother, how can you grieve me thus? I thought that sorrow was sacred in your eyes."

"Listen to me, mademoiselle," said M. Lugos, eagerly, "and when I have spoken, if you still doubt that I have been sent here by your father, I swear to you by the life of Madame de Mathis, who hears and judges me, that you will never see me again."

Andrée looked at her godmother. The poor woman's eyes, in which all her intelligence was concentrated, glittered with hope and joy.

"Speak, sir," said the young girl, still anxiously.

"Do you remember your early childhood?" asked the stranger.

At this unexpected question Andrée started. She looked down as though endeavouring to summon up cherished recollections. M. Lugos had suddenly recalled the memory of departed happiness. "Yes, yes," said she, "I have forgotten nothing. One evening when the sun was sinking on the horizon, and the blue sea shone below our windows, my mother held me in her arms and pointed to a ship which was spreading its white sails in the distance. 'Your father is there,' said she, covering me with kisses. I was five years old, and I remember that evening as though it were yesterday. I stretched out my hands towards the vessel, which gradually disappeared in the mists of the evening, and I wept when it had vanished."

"Yes," said the stranger; "the house where you lived was built on a rock overlooking the bay of the falls at the foot of the extinct volcano on the island of La Réunion, and the ship was called the 'Saint Paul.'"

"How do you know that?" asked the young girl in surprise.

"Did I not tell you that I was sent here by your father?"

"No, that is impossible ! The 'Saint Paul' was wrecked off the coast of Madagascar, and not a single passenger was saved."

"And your mother died without seeing the man she loved so well," said the stranger, in an altered tone.

Andrée only replied by bowing her head. "She died in the arms of Madame de Mathis, calling upon your father's name."

"Yes," said Andrée, sobbing ; "his name was the last word she uttered."

"That name was Albert, was it not?" said M. Lugos.

The young girl raised her head, and through her tears her black eyes gleamed. "You know that?" she exclaimed.

"Listen to me, Andrée," said the stranger, whose voice trembled as he called the young girl by her name, "you are not yet eighteen, but misfortune has made a woman of you, and the time has come for telling you what you do not yet know with regard to your own life."

M. Lugos stopped for a moment, and his eyes sought those of Madame de Mathis, as though he wished to say to her : "Have confidence in me." Andrée breathlessly awaited what was about to follow.

"Your father was born in the west of France," resumed the stranger, "and his family was involved in all the civil wars of this century. They had fought for the king till the day when, ruined and proscribed, the head of the family was obliged to fly to England with a son, thirteen years old, the last of his race. At the end of the fatal year of 1832, the father died of poverty and distress, and the son was left to wander penniless about the streets of London. He was strong and courageous ; he embarked as a sailor on a ship, in the East India Company's service, and began the hard struggle of life. Fifteen years later, he had command of a packet boat on the Indian Ocean, and it was during one of his voyages that he met a charming young girl on the island of Mauritius. They loved one another. Jeanne Salazie was an orphan like himself, and had no relative but Madame de Mathis. The young captain had amassed a small fortune at sea. He left the service, and bought a plantation in the wildest part of the island of La Réunion where land is cheaper than at Mauritius. It is there that you were born, Andrée, and it was there that your father kissed you for the last time."

"Tell me more, sir, tell me more !" cried the young girl, trembling with emotion.

"Happiness does not belong to this life," resumed M. Lugos. "Three bad crops in succession ruined the family, and your father thought of France, which he had not seen for twenty years. One last hope remained to him, and he determined to go there. The lands belonging to his family had been sold at a low price, and the château where he had been born had passed into the hands of his father's steward. However, this man had formerly possessed the confidence of his employer, and your father had faith in his honour. He set out wishing to ask this faithful retainer to account for a sum of money which the old count had left at the château when he was exiled from France."

"He started, and never returned," said Andrée sadly.

"No, he did not return," continued the stranger, in a sharper tone, "because the miserable varlet to whom the money had been confided, denied having ever had the deposit in his possession. Your father, who had by a miracle escaped shipwreck on the coast of Madagascar, found only injustice and persecution in France. Thrown into prison as an imposter, he made his escape and fled from the land of his birth."

"But, since then," cried the young girl, "since then he must have returned to Mauritius; we should have seen him. He must be dead, you see."

"He learned that heaven had taken your mother away, and that Madame de Mathis had adopted you. He was poor, despised, and slandered. He left France, after taking the oath to return there rich and powerful. He kept his word."

"Rich! powerful!" repeated Andrée, in an accent of grief. "Did he think that his daughter would not love him if he returned poor and unhappy?"

"No; but he desired wealth for your sake, and the power to avenge himself," said the stranger, in a lower tone.

"Oh!" said the young girl joining her hands, "if I could but see him, embrace him, speak to him of my mother, I am sure that he would think no more either of riches or revenge."

The expression of M. Lugos's face changed. He closed his eyes, and a moment later seemed about to rise; but his emotion was only transient, and when he raised his head, his features were calm and his voice no longer trembled. He had resumed the quiet tone and measured gestures of the mere man of business.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," said he politely, "for having told you so sad a story. I was obliged to give you pain, however, in order to convince you that I was acting in your father's name; but, if you still doubt it, here is the seal which your mother gave him on their wedding-day."

"Oh, heavens!" said Andrée, touching the trinket with a trembling hand, "it seems to me that I see all my past life again. How often have I begged my mother to explain to me what that lion engraved on the stone meant."

"It is your father's crest," said M. Lugos, gravely.

"Was it he who gave you this seal?"

"Yes, it was he."

"In that case," said the young girl, hesitating, "he is here, in Paris?" The stranger made a gesture of assent. "He can live so near me, then, without summoning me to him, without opening his arms to me, without saying: 'Andrée, you are now no longer alone in the world, your father is living, your father who loves you!'"

"What is there to prove to you that he is not obeying a fatality stronger than his own will?" replied M. Lugos. "What is there to prove that he has not been near you many times, with pain in his heart, but proud of his daughter whom he has scarcely dared to look at? Do not condemn your father, Andrée, he has suffered too much to be judged as other men are judged."

M. Lugos spoke with that warmth which is so powerful with others, because it is that of the soul, and the young girl, deeply touched, could not resist the feeling which led her to say: "I believe you, sir, and I am ready to obey my father's wishes."

"Thank you, mademoiselle! I will tell you what they are. In the first place, you must accept this bond which secures your independence and that of your godmother."

"But Madame Mornac has offered us a home, which will be all we need."

"It does not suit your father that his daughter should be dependent upon any one," said the stranger, firmly. "A daughter who bears his name must not be situated like that."

"His name," repeated Andrée, sadly; "I do not even know it. I have always been called by that of my mother's family."

The stranger did not appear to notice these words. "There is no objection," continued he, "to your giving this deed to Monsieur Mornac, whom you can inform of our interview."

"Will you see him?" timidly asked the young girl. "He would be glad to thank you."

"The day will come, Andrée, when you father will be able to prove his gratitude to those who have protected you; but though that day must still be delayed, do not forget that I watch over you, and if ever any danger threatens you, write to me at the address which you will find in this envelope, and seal your letter with that crest which is your own. I shall be near, always ready to defend you."

And then, without giving Andrée time to reply, M. Ingos, having placed the deed and the seal bearing the crest on the table, rose up, bowed respectfully to Madame de Mathis and the young girl, and then, as though he feared he might yield to some impulse beyond his control, quickly turned and left the drawing-room.

VIII.

It was noon, and a bright October sun shone down upon the pile of dry mud, which the Parisians call the Butte Montmartre. This height, illustrious in Christian tradition, is now almost entirely concealed by buildings, and its martyrs only figure in legendary lore. On the southern side the houses run up in close clusters like spectators climbing up to have a better view; roofs overlook other roofs, and innumerable windows pierce every storey. These suggest eyes fixed upon Paris, and if one might compare the city to a huge theatre, Montmartre might be called the upper gallery, vulgarly termed "Paradise."

The opposite side of the height still retains more of its earlier aspect. The houses do not rise above the summit and the taverns do not extend beyond the edge of the abrupt slope which overlooks the plain of Saint-Denis. Beyond the drinking-rooms and gardens which take the place of the mills which formerly stood there, extends a patch of land which no longer seems to be in the city, as only isolated hovels rise up here and there, reminding one in a degree of vegetable parasites. Nor is this tract in the country, for the soil is composed of plaster, dust, and fragments of broken bottles; grass never growing upon the deserted waste. The borders of the Dead Sea are not more desolate than this ugly corner of the French metropolis.

At noon, toward the end of the summer, wandering dogs and tramps, asleep in the sunlight, alone inhabit this open tract. The residents of the neighbourhood seldom venture there, and the presence of an elegant young man, who on the day we speak of was coming down the northern slope, might be considered quite an event. This daring traveller had not certainly come there with any desire to contemplate the panorama which stretches as far as the wood of Montmorency, for he did not even deign to look at the landscape. On his right, at the extreme edge of the plateau, there stood a queer little isolated house with a grey frontage and a roof of red tiles. This odd construction was the object of his exclusive attention. He seemed to be trying to distinguish some object moving on the sill of one

of the first-floor windows, and he approached slowly, like a man who is hesitating or waiting for a signal. He finally reached the house near enough to see that this object was a raven, gravely hopping about near the window. Below the latter there was a board, bearing, in big letters, the words : "Madame Blanchet, Somnambulist ; first storey, left side."

The bird, as though to greet a visitor, now began to croak ; and the gentleman muttered : "She has put Gorab out on the window-sill, so she must be alone." Thereupon he went toward the door.

He did not need to knock ; the stairs were visible from the narrow passage, the door of which stood open. The house, besides, seemed to be but little occupied and very badly guarded, for the visitor's footsteps upon the mouldy stairs did not bring anyone to see who was there. The young man ran lightly up the stairs, and stopped before a door having a little peep-hole, intended, no doubt, to enable the tenant to inspect whatever visitors might present themselves. He was about to announce his presence by pulling a bell-rope, adorned very elegantly with a huge crocodile's foot, when a strange face showed itself behind the aperture. It was a black head with woolly hair and white eyes, glittering in the gloom, a head which really might have been that of an ourang-outang, for it had little likeness to that of a human being. "Is it you, Jules ? I was waiting for you, my son," said a voice, the sweetness of which contrasted strangely with the frightful appearance of this singular being. At the same time the door opened noiselessly, and the visitor went in.

"Why did you expect me ?" said he, in a rough voice.

"Because the cards told me that you were coming."

Noridet (for it was he) shrugged his shoulders, went down a passage which brought him to a large room, almost destitute of furniture, and threw himself upon a divan covered with a wolfskin. The somnambulist followed him, after having carefully close the door, and took a seat at a table covered with anomalous objects.

The profession of sorceress, now so common in Paris, has in Europe but few adepts in the race to which the mistress of this hovel belonged. The sibyl was an old negress. Her colour and attire were marvellously well adapted to the avocation she had chosen. The only adornment on her head was a mass of woolly, grey hair, and her slender form was draped in a long robe of yellow calico. Her features were more regular and less flat than those of the blacks of Africa, and a creole would have easily divined that this woman belonged to the Ovis tribe of Madagascar.

Cards covered with singular designs were spread out before her, and some strange vials placed in a line upon the table sufficiently indicated what business she carried on ; for, like most persons of the same kind, she was also a quack doctor.

This strange creature gazed at Noridet with an expression of purely animal affection, which made her look like a she-ape admiring her cub. However, instead of seeming pleased by her survey, he gave unequivocal signs of ill-humour. He frowned, bit his lip, and tapped his boots with his cane. "Here is some money," he said at last, throwing a large knitted purse on the table.

The negress did not stir, however, and her hands did not let go of the cards which she was arranging in order. "Yes," she murmured, talking to herself, "he is rich now, but his twenty-ninth year draws nigh."

"Enough of that, Aurora, you old fool !" cried Noridet in an angry

tone. "I did not come here to listen to your nonsense. Leave your cards and answer me."

"Speak, my son," said the negress, gravely, but still fingering the bits of pasteboard.

"I have succeeded," said Noridet. "The fortune is mine; but there is a man who knows my secret. There is a man who knows my life, my family, my entire past, who hates me, who conceals himself, and who, to-morrow, may reappear to ruin me. I wish to rid myself of him, and in order to do that you must first help me to find out his real name."

The somnambulist did not reply, but shook her head.

"Come, Aurora," said Noridet, more calmly, "this man who knows all about my birth must have lived in Mauritius. He must have had something to do, in former times, with events in which my father or else my uncle was interested. Consult your memory. Try to recollect."

"What is his age? What does he look like?" asked the negress.

"He may be of any age between forty and sixty. I don't know at all how old he is, but he is tall, dark, with black eyebrows and grey eyes."

Aurora was silent, and seemed lost in deep thought. "There is only one white man, who knew all the secrets of your family history," she said at last, "and he—"

"Well?"

"He is dead."

"That amounts to nothing. Is that all you have to tell me?" said Noridet, impatiently, as he rose and began to pace the room. "I was afraid that she had nothing to tell," he added, between his teeth.

The negress again began to turn over her cards, when, suddenly, Noridet, who was looking carelessly out of the open window, gave a start of surprise. This window opened upon a sort of precipice, for on this side the house faced the extreme edge of the slope. Directly below the window the buildings of Clignancourt showed their roofs, rising to a level with the ground floor of the sorceress's tenement; and a person installed there could look down upon the yards and even into the rooms of the dwellings below. The people residing in these houses were thus directly under the eyes of the somnambulist, who was indebted to this circumstance for the knowledge of more than one household secret.

Noridet, absorbed in his reflections, had begun by looking indifferently at the commonplace sight. Children sprawling over the pavement and women hanging out clothes did not interest him greatly, but, involuntarily, his eyes had turned to a terrace on the third floor of one of the houses—a terrace on which a veritable garden of flowers was outspread. This parterre, hung in mid-air and growing thirty feet below the level of Aurora's window, indicated the presence of some tenant of more refined tastes than were usually prevalent among the working-people of the neighbourhood. Flower-boxes full of superb geraniums were spread about, and creeping plants arranged to form an arbour covered the terrace with a dome of verdure.

A woman's hand must have presided over this pretty arrangement, and Noridet, despite his serious anxieties, could not refrain from trying to find out where the woman was. This is a habit peculiar to most gay fellows, and one that he had not been able to rid himself of; and his curiosity was agreeably rewarded, for, among the clematis and nasturtiums, he at last espied a charming face—that of a young girl.

In the over-excited state of his mind, external impressions acted with

greater force upon him, and every meeting became an event. However, the appearance of a pretty "grisette" was surely not an event to divert him from his gloomy thoughts for long, and yet he took a pleasure in watching this fair and rosy young creature watering her flowers, and chatting with a man seated under the verdure.

However, Noridet's ideas soon took another turn. The man in question rose and came toward the edge of the terrace. He was a strongly-built fellow, dressed like some workman taking a holiday, and Noridet had a faint recollection of having somewhere seen his dark face, brilliant eyes, and glittering teeth. The young girl plucked here and there a sprig of geranium or a clematis blossom, and took them to him in a childishly-caressing manner, which left no doubt as to their relationship: the broad-shouldered man was evidently the girl's father.

Noridet had excellent eyesight, and an exceptionally good memory, and after a moment's observation, he quietly withdrew from the window, closed it noiselessly, and then resumed his watch through the flimsy muslin curtains; he had just recognised the Rue Vanneau smith.

This unforeseen meeting was, at first seeming, not at all extraordinary. A workman might very well live with his daughter at the foot of the Butte Montmartre, and yet go to work every day at the corner of the Rue de Sèvres; however, the instinct of evil caused Noridet to detect an unaccountable connection between this man and M. Lugos. He had already more than once thought that the smith had been installed on the ground floor in the Rue Vanneau to serve as a sentinel for the mysterious stranger, and keep a look-out. Accordingly, the present occasion was a good one for clearing up his doubts on the subject.

Without leaving his post, he began to question the negress. "Do you know the people who live in the house below?" he asked abruptly.

The sonnambulist raised her head and showed her white teeth.

"I know everything, my son, you know that very well," said she, with emphasis.

"Yes, everything but what I want to know," said Noridet in an ironical tone; "I found that out just now."

"The man about whom you consulted me is dead; I told you that he was dead."

"Well, the man about whom I am going to question you is living, and resides below your window, on the third floor, in a room looking out upon a terrace covered with flowers."

Aurora turned pale after the manner of negresses, which is to say that her lips grew white. "A man?" she muttered, hastening towards the window. "Can it be that rascal of a—"

However, Noridet stopped her, and grasping her arm tightly, exclaimed: "Look there! Right before us."

The excitement of the sorceress suddenly subsided. "That is her father. He does not live here," she said, breathing heavily.

"The young girl's father, do you mean?"

"Yes, that saucy thing's father," grumbled the negress.

"What does he do?"

"He is a workman, and must work at some factory. He only comes here on Mondays."

"What do you know about her?"

"That gad-about! She calls herself an artificial flower-maker, and her name is Louise Bernard. Flower-maker, indeed! Well, she has that bit

of a garden. But she hasn't a penny ; and yet she has plenty of geraniums, you see."

These remarks did not tell Noridet much, but he had the habit of following up all indications, and the negress's excitement had not escaped him. "What have you against this young girl?" he asked, looking Aurora full in the face.

"I don't like her because she is white," answered the sorceress after a pause. "You are white, but I fed you with my milk. You are my foster-son—I have two sons—you and Fortoto, but I won't have anything more to do with him."

In the midst of these disjointed words, Noridet had been struck by one name, that of his foster-brother, the negress's real son, and so he changed his tactics.

"What has poor Fortoto done to you?" he asked in a tone of affectionate interest. "I just remembered that I wanted to speak to him. I am sure that you never give him a penny."

"Why should I give him money to spend on that white girl who has turned his head? No, no! His mother will keep her money for herself. A bad fellow, Fortoto! He had a situation, and he lost it because he would run about all day after a good-for-nothing creature."

"It seems to me that I did hear something about his being an inspector or police officer," said Noridet, with affected indifference.

"He was dismissed, the rascal! the vagabond!" grumbled the sorceress.

"Come, come, nurse! what if I find him some other employment?"

"Other employment!" she muttered between her teeth. "If I could only get him out of Paris."

"Do you want him to go away?"

"Yes, I don't want him to return to Montmartre."

"That can be arranged. I am just going into the country, and I will arrange matters."

"Then I shall be satisfied," said the negress, quite pacified. "You are good, you are my son, my white son, my Jules," she continued, gradually working herself up to a state of enthusiasm.

But Jules no longer listened to her. During this long dialogue he had not left the window, whence he had watched all the smith's motions. From the moment of recognising him he had determined to follow him when he left, and to accost him if necessary. This plan appeared to him less dangerous, and better than the scheme of pursuing M. Lugos in a cab, which had cost him a reproof. Noridet had just perceived that the smith was getting ready to leave. To join him in the street it would be necessary to make a long turn, and he had but sufficient time to accomplish it.

"Well, then, it is settled, nurse," said he. "Fortoto shall have a situation. Now, tell me quickly, which is the shortest way to get to the door of the house below?"

"You must turn to the left as you go out, and go down the Rue de la Fontenelle."

Noridet remembered having read the name of this street on his way to the sorceress's, so the information sufficed him. "Good-bye," said he, rushing towards the door; "I will see your son to-day, and will come and tell you what I can do for him. By-the-bye, where does he live?"

"I don't know," replied the negress, curtly. Her good humour had altogether vanished again.

"Then what the mischief shall I do?" cried Noridet, who was already on the stairs.

Aurora looked at him as he ran down four steps at a time, and seemed to hesitate. Finally, however, she made up her mind, and leaning over the bannister, she called out: "You'll find him at the end of the Austerlitz Bridge. He is there every day at two o'clock, the rascal!"

Noridet ran over the open ground behind the house, turned to the left, and darted down the Rue de la Fontenelle, which leads to the Château Rouge.

While he was going down this slope, inaccessible to vehicles, he perceived at a hundred paces ahead of him, the smith, who was quietly making for the Chaussée Clignancourt, on his way into Paris. If, as seemed likely, the workman was returning to the Rue Vanneau, Noridet had no need to fear losing the scent, and he wished to reflect a moment before accosting him. It was, besides, important to avoid being remarked in a quarter to which he might often be obliged to return, and where his elegant attire was calculated to attract attention. He therefore adopted a quiet gait, and ceased to dart along at a pace which had already brought several people to their windows.

This was certainly a wiser course, but it had an unexpected result. On reaching the Chaussée Clignancourt, he no longer saw the smith anywhere. Although he had been but little ahead, he had altogether vanished. Noridet looked round him in vain; there were no signs of the fellow, and as on the sidewalks there were but few passers-by, he had certainly not mingled with any crowd.

Noridet went rapidly along, looking into the shops, one of which the smith might perhaps have entered. But the search was fruitless; the fellow was not to be found. His disappearance could only be accounted for by his driving off in some vehicle, but when Noridet scanned the street he saw no cabs in sight; there was only a stylish brougham drawn by two horses going at a fast trot, and which finally turned the corner of the boulevard. Had this stylish equipage taken the flower-girl's father away? Jules was almost tempted to think so; but even had he been sure of it, the means of ascertaining anything further were wanting. He was obliged to resign himself to this fresh defeat.

Noridet, although somewhat annoyed by this incident, did not lose time in useless search, but resolutely set out towards Paris. Having missed his chance, he wished to arrange another plan without delay.

A week had elapsed since the reading of M. de Mathis's will, and Jules had had ample time to reflect upon the new situation in which recent events had placed him. M. Lugos had kept his promise—he was rich. Millions were at his disposal. He had in his desk all the title deeds, the shares and bonds, with three hundred thousand francs in cash, which he had at once removed from the bank in which his uncle had placed it. He had entered into possession of all this without the slightest difficulty, for M. Mornac had at once placed in the hands of the family lawyer the copy of the will which M. de Mathis had, by a fatal mistake, enclosed in the envelope instead of the one he had signed. Noridet was the sole lineal heir. The necessary formalities had been all the more simple as the widow had not brought forward any claim to any rights she might have had in virtue of her marriage contract.

Andrée and her godmother had left the château to repair to Madame Mornac's house, and since their departure they had held no communication with Noridet, who remained for the time master of the situation. Every-

thing remained quiet, as M. Lugos had given no further sign of interference, and the poisoner might consider himself the peacefully recognised and undisputed heir of his uncle's fortune, and try to dismiss the goading recollections which pursued him.

However, he could not forget that he owed his wealth to a mistake, and that the will with the signature was in his enemy's hands. The formidable stranger played with Noridet like a cat with a mouse. He held him in his clutches, and might annihilate him by a single blow. The incident of the will alone revealed the scope of his immense power. He knew all, could do everything it seemed, and since the scene at the inn, Jules no longer had the resource of killing him. It would have been self-destruction, since the proofs of the crime he had committed were in the hands of one of M. Lugos's friends. It was this friend whom it was now necessary to discover, and M. de Mathis's nephew hoped to accomplish the feat.

To bring such a difficult enterprise to a satisfactory conclusion, it was necessary, in the first place, to assure peace with his terrible enemy by obeying him in all things. Noridet therefore executed to the letter such orders as he had as yet received.

He paid a visit to the Baroness Brossin, and accepted her invitation to visit her in the country on the following week. He even proposed to keep his word and spend a fortnight at the château of Monville, even though he must needs resign himself to pay court to Mademoiselle Henriette, and listen to the baron's talk about money matters and young Alfred's insipid gabble. He, besides, relied upon finding out, during his visit in Normandy, what aim M. Lugos was really pursuing. The conduct of the Brossin family, and a few questions, might perhaps help him in this respect; however, he wished at the same time to carry on, in Paris, an inquiry as to the true identity of the stranger, and especially as to his social connections. In order to do this it was necessary to find an agent who would at once be unscrupulous, skilful, and devoted.

He had thought of obtaining some information from Aurora, as to M. Lugos, for he suspected that the stranger had had some by-gone connection with the Mathis family; but the recollections of the negress furnished nothing that could be connected with this mysterious man. It is true that Noridet had not revealed much to her. He had been accustomed from his infancy to consider his nurse as a passive instrument whom he might dispose of as he pleased, and he was not mistaken. The Madagascar woman had that purely animal affection for him which never reasons and does not even hesitate at crime. Her "white son," as she called him, had one day asked her for some poison, and she had given it to him just as she would have given him the blood of her veins had he needed it. This animal-like devotion was the more extraordinary from the fact that in various respects the negress was highly civilised. She had been brought to France by Jules's father, had received several gifts from him together with a legacy, and had contrived to increase her little fortune by dabbling in various suspicious avocations, the least dishonourable of which was her business as a fortune teller. She had all the superstition peculiar to her race, and thought, in all good faith, that she was able to foretell the future. She had a long time previously read in the cards that Jules would be very rich at twenty-seven, and that a great danger would threaten him in his twenty-ninth year. The death of M. de Mathis had brought the first prediction to pass, and Aurora entertained no doubt as to the fulfilment of the second.

Noridet had failed to elicit any information respecting M. Lugos during

his conversation with her; but her chatter had suggested another idea to him. The strange creature had a real son, and this fellow was the very man that Noridet needed. Fortoto, whose father had been a white man, whom Aurora never mentioned, was a mulatto, and thus possessed the faults and qualities both of the Caucasian and negro races. Noridet had lost sight of him for some years, but he thought he could rely upon his devotion. He had at one time belonged to the police, and was now without a situation, in fact quite destitute of resources if his mother were to be believed. The moment was therefore a good one to make him certain proposals. Taking advantage of Aurora's directions, Noridet hailed a cab, and without thinking in the least for what purpose Fortoto might be in the habit of repairing to the Bridge of Austerlitz every day at two o'clock, he told the driver to take him there. As he wished to avoid remark, he, moreover, directed his Jehu to stop at the corner of the Boulevard Bourdon, and walked slowly along the esplanade at the end of the bridge, between the canal and the Quai de Bercy.

If Fortoto was in the habit of strolling about this spot every day, it would not be very hard to find him. Smoking his cigar, Noridet sauntered along, and presently saw quite a crowd gathered in one corner. Thinking that Fortoto might be one of the lookers-on, he drew near, and walked round the circle formed by the assembled persons—a circle somewhat compact, so that it was difficult to see what was going on in the centre. The crowd was composed of common soldiers, nurses, and urchins, but Fortoto was not to be seen. Noridet was going further on, when it occurred to him that Aurora's dusky son might be in the inner ranks of the throng, so he decided to wait till the party dispersed. The people could only be watching some mountebank, and, indeed, Noridet, by dint of pushing and shoving, suddenly perceived that a man stood in the middle, with his back to him, a man whose dress was a mingling of the costume of a Peruvian Cazique, a Sarmatian warrior, and a Zouave of the Imperial guard. He wore a diadem of parrot's feathers, a tin coat of mail, and yellow gaiters. Before him was a table, upon which he seemed to be working away very rapidly at something or other, talking meantime with the utmost volubility to the crowd. He was, in point of fact, relating, in a falsetto voice, which could not be his natural one, a marvellous story of travel, from which it appeared that an Indian prince had confided to him the secret for cleaning old brass. This narrative, enlivened by jokes and conundrums, had great success, and the audience laughed heartily.

"This recipe, gentlemen," he cried, in conclusion, "has enabled me to prepare my 'Bengal Powder,' which I have the honour of offering you for the moderate price of—two louis? no—two francs? no—you will never believe it, but the incredibly low price is—two ha'pence! Yes, gentlemen, two ha'pence! Here are the boxes. There are half boxes, at a halfpenny, for those who are just setting up housekeeping. Ask, and I will serve you!" yelled the orator, divesting himself of the old candlestick, which he had been briskly polishing, and beginning to make the tour of the crowd.

His eloquence had produced a certain effect, and in spite of the movement of retreat, which always results in a crowd when the moment arrives for putting one's hand into one's pocket, the "Bengal Powder" met with a fair sale.

Noridet had relied upon the dispersing of the group to find his man, and was about to move away when the mountebank showed him his face, and he recognised the friend of the Indian Prince as none other than Fortoto.

The mountebank came slowly towards Noridet, distributing his boxes, and giving echange, which he took from a fox-skin bag hanging over his coat of mail; and by the time he reached Jules, the latter had made ready to hold out a silver coin in exchange for some of the marvellous powder. This done, he looked straight in Fortoto's face, and made him a sign that he wished to speak to him.

The elegant Jules had not been mistaken in relying on Fortoto's presence of mind and intelligence, for the mulatto showed no signs of surprise, and merely made a low bow to the generous purchaser who had paid him so liberally for his recipe for cleaning brass candlesticks. But when he had gone his rounds he repaired again to his table and said to the public, by way of a farewell address: "Gentlemen"—this was spoken in his natural voice, "I have the honour of informing such persons as may wish to see me to-day, that they will find me, until five o'clock, at two steps from here, at the restaurant of Monsieur Pitois, known by its sign 'The famous fried fish.' You can see the sign from here, by the way," he added, turning towards the Seine.

As he spoke, he began to fold up his table very quickly, and put away his old brasses, while the audience dispersed over the esplanade.

Noridet understood his meaning, and walked slowly towards the establishment which had been pointed out. It was an humble restaurant built against the parapet of the quay. The door opened on a court adorned with green arbours, and the windows overlooked the river. Three o'clock had just struck and the place appeared to be deserted. There was no reason to fear being disturbed there in the afternoon. The spot was therefore well chosen for a private talk.

Noridet went into the little garden, fanning himself with his hat as though he felt very warm, and seated himself under one of the arbours, after asking for some beer. From the place he chose he was sure of seeing the mountebank come in. He relied upon Fortoto avoiding an interview in the absurd costume he now wore, and, indeed, Jules had only been seated for a few moments when the mulatto strode by in his fantastic garb and carrying his table; then after whispering: "I am going to change my clothes and will be back in a quarter of an hour," he vanished into the house. Noridet congratulated himself upon having selected so quick-witted a fellow. And he realised moreover that he was punctual, for before the quarter of an hour had elapsed, Fortoto re-appeared, having exchanged his diadem of feathers for a felt hat, his coat of mail for a carefully brushed if somewhat worn frock coat, and his leggings for a pair of grey trousers. He came softly into the arbour, and stood looking at Noridet with evident pleasure. He felt a sincere attachment for Jules, whom he had long been in the habit of calling by his Christian name, and although his foster-brother had taken but little notice of him since his return to France, he was quite ready to serve him; Noridet merely had to glance at him to see this.

"My poor Fortoto," said he in a tone of interest, "I hardly expected to see you dressed like Mangin the quack. What a strange business you seem to have chosen!"

The mountebank, who was piteously twisting his hat in his hands, answered in a timid manner. "Well, you know, Monsieur Jules, people cannot always do what they would prefer to do. I never learned any trade; no one would take me as a workman, anywhere; whereas with my powder I earn enough to live."

"I thought that you had a situation."

Fortoto seemed more and more embarrassed. "That is true, Monsieur Jules," he said, with some hesitation, "and it was a good one. I was in the detective service, and was about to be appointed inspector."

"But they dismissed you, did they not? What did you do? Tell me all about it."

"Ah, Monsieur Jules," said the mountebank, with a sigh, "it was all my own fault! What could I do? People can't help such things! I fell in love and I didn't go regularly to my work."

At this confidential communication, which he had foreseen, Noridet burst into such a hearty laugh that he utterly disconcerted poor Fortoto. "You were in love, were you? Well, are you in love still?"

"More than ever!" replied the mountebank, in a tone which indicated great grief.

"From the way you say that, I judge that your love affairs don't prosper."

The mulatto shook his head.

"So the beauty does not love you, eh?"

"I don't know, Monsieur Jules; sometimes I hope, and then afterwards I think that I must be crazy to do so."

"The deuce! This is a 'grand passion,' it appears. But I shouldn't think that your 'Bengal powder' would tempt your *Dulcinea* to set up housekeeping. Come, if I could get you something to do that would enable you to earn a good deal of money in very little time, that would perhaps help on your little matters, eh?"

Fortoto's face brightened, and he said in a trembling voice: "Oh, how kind you are, Monsieur Jules! If I only had a little capital I would buy a business, and then I might, perhaps, venture to ask her father to let her marry me."

"So she has a father?"

"A very honest man, let me tell you, who has a fine position!"

"Bah! has he, indeed?"

"I should say he had! He is the friend of a great foreign nobleman, who is a millionaire."

"But who doesn't share his millions with him, I presume?"

"No, but he confides all his business to him," said Fortoto, proudly.

There was a moment's silence. Noridet was thinking how to arrive at his purpose without committing himself. He had no doubt but that Fortoto, urged on by the hope of money, which would enable him to marry, would willingly enter his service; still, in setting him upon the track of the blacksmith and M. Lugos, he did not care to tell him too much.

"What is your future father-in-law's name?" he asked, in order to give himself time to think, "and where does the fair one live? Come, tell me! Do you know that to oblige you I feel quite ready to put on a pair of white gloves and go to ask her hand for you? I do, indeed."

The poor lover made no haste to reply. "Oh, if you are afraid of me we will say no more about it," urged Noridet.

"I afraid of you, Monsieur Jules! You know very well that I'm not. The girl I love is named Louise Bernard, and she lives at Montmartre, directly under my mother's window, and her father is the Count d'Alemaio's steward."

Noridet, in spite of himself, could not repress a start of mingled delight and surprise. Chance was serving him marvellously well. The blacksmith of the Rue Vanneau, whose track he had lost, was known to Fortoto. It was now perhaps only necessary to make the mountebank talk to get at

M. Lugos. But Noridet at once realised that he must take great precautions in dealing with Louise Bernard's lover. To propose to him to spy upon his future father-in-law would be useless, assuredly ; it would be wiser to try and win his confidence by pretending to be greatly interested in his love affairs.

"Come now, my poor Fortoto," said Jules, in a tone of the most affectionate interest, "I ask nothing better than to serve you, but you must explain matters more clearly. A young girl who lives all alone at Montmartre, while her father is taking charge of a nobleman's establishment, that's something I do not altogether understand, and I am afraid that you have made some mistake somewhere."

"There is no danger of that, Monsieur Jules. Louise is a virtuous girl, and if she does not live with her father it is because Monsieur Bernard is obliged to follow the count, who travels a good deal."

"Oh ! I see," said Noridet, with affected indifference ; "the count is a foreigner, you say ?"

"An Italian, I believe. He has a great deal of property in Sicily, and is only here for a time."

"But he puts up somewhere in Paris, I suppose ?"

"Yes, he always puts up at the Grand Hôtel."

"And is he coming there soon ?" asked Noridet, making a mental note of all the information thus acquired.

"He has been here since last week, and Monsieur Bernard comes every day to Montmartre. That's why I can only see Louise from afar, for I don't dare to show myself to her father," sighed Fortoto.

"All this seems to me very confused," said Noridet, shaking his head ; "but I know a great many people, and I can, perhaps, find some way of obtaining an introduction to this count—what did you say his name was ?"

"Count d'Alcaino."

"All right. I will make inquiries, and if his steward isn't too lofty an individual to accept you as a son-in-law, I will help you with all my heart. Your mother, Aurora, has some money, you know."

"My mother won't have anything to say to me since I lost my situation."

"I will undertake to reconcile you both, but in the meantime tell me a little about how you became acquainted with this young girl. In order to ask her father to let her marry you, I must at least know how far your courtship has progressed."

Fortoto's heart beat fast, and he began his story in a trembling voice : "You see, Monsieur Jules, it all commenced a year ago. When I was not on duty I was with my mother, and one day when I was looking out of the window I saw Louise on her terrace. It was just as though something had pricked me in the heart, and I stared at her so stupidly that she burst out laughing. But that made no difference to me. As soon as I could get away from the prefecture I used to go to Montmartre and sit at the window. She did not laugh any more, only whenever she saw me she went into her room."

"You are not easily discouraged, it appears," said Noridet, smiling.

"No, Monsieur Jules, but for a long time I didn't dare to speak to her, I assure you."

"Tell me how you did so at last. You did not declare your love from Aurora's window, I presume ?"

"I knew that she was fond of flowers ; so I bought the best that I could find at the Madeleine market. All my money went that way, and I handed

my flower-pots to the doorkeeper's wife to give to Mademoiselle Louise Bernard, telling her that they came from her father."

"You knew her name, then?"

"Oh, that I found out by inquiry, you see! Being in the police service, it was easy enough for me to make the neighbours talk. But my plan did not long succeed. Louise went past the Château Rouge every evening as she carried her work home, and I took good care to be there as she came by. One evening she stopped directly before me, and said in an angry way that cut me to the heart: 'If it is you who keep sending me flowers, you can take them back from the doorkeeper.' I could not find a word to reply, and she left me there. I saw her tripping along the boulevard, and I didn't even dare to follow her. But I had a stroke of good luck, and no mistake! She had scarcely gone ten paces when she fell in with a lot of good-for-nothing fellows who had been dining at the barrière, and who began to insult her. Ah! it didn't take me long to settle them. I upset two or three, and the rest made off. I got a blow in the chest from one man's fist, and a knock on the head from another man's cane, but Louise thanked me in so kind a tone, that I did not give all that a thought."

"Do you know that your love affair began like love affairs usually begin in novels? It's very romantic, and I suppose that your heroism was rewarded?"

"Ever since that evening," mournfully resumed Fortoto, "Louise has allowed me to wait for her at the same place, and to send her some flowers. That is all I have gained as yet."

"What! haven't you ever proposed marriage to her?"

"Oh, yes, but I was embarrassed, because I did not wish her to know that I belonged to the police, so I had to tell her no end of fibs. I saw very well that she liked me a little, but that she would never accept me as a suitor until she was sure of my real position, and for that reason I wasn't sorry when I was dismissed."

"How do you manage to hide from her that you play the mountebank every day near the bridge of Austerlitz?"

"Ah! that's what troubles me! If ever Louise knew that I was a quack in the day-time, and a super at night-time, at the Fantaisies Comiques, I should never venture to speak to her again."

"Then, my poor Fortoto, I think that you would do best to accept what I have to propose to you."

"Oh, whatever you please, Monsieur Jules, so that I can only offer her a respectable home."

"Well, then, here is what I offer you in two words. I wish to have exact information about a certain person, and I shall employ you to obtain it for me. If you succeed, you shall have ten thousand francs for yourself."

"Ten thousand francs! Why, with that I could set up an agency, a private inquiry office, and I should make a fortune."

"A capital idea, and it will depend entirely upon yourself. Meanwhile, as you cannot keep on selling 'Bengal powder,' I will give you a five-hundred-franc note every month until you find my man for me."

"Be easy. If he is in Paris I shall find him."

"Good! when will you begin? The sooner the better."

"To-morrow, if you like, Monsieur Jules, for this evening, you see, I have to be on the stage at the Fantaisies Comiques, and I haven't warned the manager about leaving yet."

"Ah, true ! I forgot that you were a super. Do as you please ; you mustn't miss going to the theatre."

"No, indeed, for there is a first performance to-night, and every seat in the house is engaged ; even the Count d'Alcamo has a box. Monsieur Bernard told Louise so. But I shall warn the manager this evening that I have found something else to do, and if you like, Monsieur Jules, I will go to see you to-morrow."

"Count d'Alcamo," said Noridet, "your future father-in-law's employer ?"

"Yes ; and perhaps Monsieur Bernard will come at the end of the performance to take his orders in his box. Fortunately, he won't know me if he sees me on the stage."

Noridet said nothing, but reflected. The chance thus offered him seemed too good to be neglected. To see the smith of the Rue Vanneau and the stranger he served, together, would perhaps yield an advantageous result. However, he disliked showing himself publicly at a theatre. His mourning was too recent, and he wished to see without being seen himself.

"Could you take me into the slips with you ?" asked he.

"What ! Monsieur Jules, would you like to go ? Well, I don't know. The woman at the stage door isn't very obliging."

"Bah ! with two louis I can go in anywhere ; and once in, I'll manage the rest."

"Well, then, all right. I should be glad to show you Louise's father."

"And I shall be glad to see him and his master," said Noridet, with a smile, the true sense of which Fortoto naturally failed to understand.

IX.

THAT same evening, at about eight o'clock, the usually dull-looking frontage of the Fantaisies Comiques blazed with light. There were luminous festoons of gas jets on the cornices, and over the door the name of the new piece shone in letters of fire. The public of the pit and galleries—that public which does not seem to wait outside for admission—had on this occasion arrived early, and the more stylish spectators were coming in. Broughams dashed at a fast trot among the bystanders near the door, and dandies in dress-coats emerged from them. From time to time, even, an eight-spring carriage, with coachman and footman whose hair was powdered, drew up majestically before the entrance of the theatre, and light dresses, flowers, and diamonds darted by, shining for an instant in the glare of the gas.

Built near the Château d'Eau, and especially intended for the amusement of that popular quarter, the Fantaisies Comiques had never attracted so fashionable a crowd before. It is true that the director had collected a number of female artistes with charming figures, and these ladies' admirers alone would have sufficed to fill the auditorium.

The piece did not offer any attraction from a literary point of view ; but, under the pretext of its being an extravaganza, there was to be a fine exhibition of shoulders and ankles, and the names of the least important even of the feminine supers were known in the gay world. Besides, the larger theatres had not yet set their winter plays on the boards ; and the autumn races had brought to Paris a number of "fast livers," who were quite disposed

to amuse themselves before bagging game in the provinces. The time was well chosen for such a piece, indeed the "Golden Scarabee" was to be presented under highly favourable circumstances.

Behind the theatre, in the narrow lane where the stage-door was to be found, there was as great a crush as in front, and the doorkeeper had a deal of trouble to prevent indiscreet admirers from pushing their way in. Noridet, however—thanks to his two louis, rather than to Fortoto's efforts—succeeded in appeasing the Cerberus, and made his way through the dark labyrinth of passages and staircases which led to the stage. Here the ground grew familiar to him. He had sufficiently run about the slips to have several acquaintances among the women, and his appearance was hailed at once by two or three young "scarabees" whom he had often met at supper at the *Café Anglais*.

"It is Jules! It is Monsieur *de Noridet*! He has just come into three millions!"

Such were the words which flew from one pretty mouth to another, and reached the lessee's ears. This important personage was strutting up and down the stage with an air of concern, and was just about to tell the stage-manager to have Noridet turned out. But a millionaire is always a man of importance in the eyes of a manager, and the lessee of the *Fantaisies Comiques* suddenly quieted himself on learning that the intruder was a rich capitalist. He foresaw a time when this enlightened patron of art might help him with a pile of cash perhaps, and so he welcomed him with perfect politeness.

Moreover, the heir would not have been embarrassed to find a pretext for his presence. Everybody round about thought that he had come to take a close look at some one of the fair stars of the stage, and this idea caused great excitement in the dressing-rooms. Noridet took good care not to deceive anyone, and to serve his purpose the better, he even condescended to address a few common-place remarks of a gallant character to the damsels who were chattering in the slips. But he did not lose sight of his aim, and, after having complimented the manager upon the brilliant success he was about to have, he applied his eye to a hole in the curtain, and began to examine the spectators.

The auditorium was full from pit to gallery, and Noridet saw that Fortoto had not deceived him, for the evening promised to be an interesting one.

In the front row of the stalls, young Alfred Brossin was exhibiting his long neck and narrow chest, which, with his white shirt-front, lent him somewhat of the appearance of a goose. He wriggled in his seat, and kept pulling down his cuffs, settling his tie, and turning frequently towards the house, in order that his acquaintances of both sexes might be sure that he was there. On his left, the handsome Vergoncey, much calmer, but visibly anxious not to crease his clothes, fixed all his attention upon a proscenium box, in which two women displayed themselves, their dresses, with extravagant trains, having with difficulty been gathered into so small a space.

Noridet recognised, not without surprise, that these women were the Baroness Brossin and her daughter, and he even remarked some significant glances exchanged between the baroness and her son's elegant friend, Vergoncey. Mademoiselle Henriette appeared to be absorbed in the contemplation of some remarkably conspicuous dresses which were to be seen in the other boxes, and the grave baron, seated behind his wife, turned his

ivory opera-glass persistently on the proscenium box exactly opposite his own.

This box was divided into two compartments. One of these was occupied by the beautiful *Impéria*, who wore a dress cut extremely low, so as to allow a full view of her charms; she fairly glittered with diamonds. The other compartment was not yet occupied, and Noridet conjectured that it might be intended for Count d'Alcamo. While he was thus reviewing the people in the auditorium, he suddenly felt some one softly pull his sleeve, and, on turning round, he saw Fortoto.

The mulatto had found time to change his costume, and now appeared rigged out with huge wings of painted pasteboard, artificial legs, and gigantic horns. Fortoto's complexion had won him the honour of representing the bla kest of insects, and Noridet could not refrain from laughing at seeing his foster-brother transformed into a stag-beetle.

"Don't I look funny, Monsieur Jules?" said the poor fellow, moving his feelers by means of strings which he skilfully drew with his finger tips.

"You are superb, and if your sweetheart could only see you, she—"

"Oh! Monsieur Jules," interrupted Fortoto, "don't say that, I pray. Louise won't see me, since, thanks to you, this is the last time I shall be obliged to appear. It is bad enough to be forced to do so before her father. It seems to me as though he might notice me and recognise me afterward."

"Her father, Monsieur Bernard? If he is here you must point him out to me."

"He is not here yet; there is no one in the box. It's the proscenium one on the left side there, the compartment next to where that brunette sits, the woman who shines as though she had a sun on her head."

"Good!" muttered Noridet, applying his eye to the peep-hole in the curtain. "I am in a good place for seeing him."

"Oh! I'll tell you when he arrives, or if I'm on the stage I'll make you a sign."

"Now then, clear off, all of you!" suddenly cried the stage-manager, brandishing the stick with which he had provided himself to give the three conventional taps. This move put a stop to the conversation.

The stag-beetle quickly disappeared behind the scenery in the rear of the stage, and Noridet went on tiptoe to the slips on the right side, near the empty box. There, leaning against a pasteboard tree, and hidden by the helmets of the firemen on duty, he was in the best possible position for watching M. d'Alcamo's box without being seen, and he made ready to observe everything which might take place in the auditorium.

The orchestra finished playing the overture, whereupon the curtain rose and displayed a scene professing to represent the "Insect Kingdom," and the act began by a chorus of male beetles. The piece had no literary merit whatever, being quite on a par with most popular extravaganzas. Noridet was listening absently to an air sung by the "Queen of the Moths," who, on making her entrance, had been greatly applauded by a group of gentlemen with low-cut waistcoats, when a sound of much greater interest to him attracted his attention. The door of the unoccupied box had opened with the noise especially reserved, it would seem, for distinguished arrivals, and a man dressed in black began to raise the screens and arrange the seats. Noridet recognised this man at once. It was the Rue Vanneau blacksmith, the father of the Montmartre "grisette," transformed into the steward of a noble household, with white gloves on his hands and a serious

look on his face, like that of an individual who realizes the importance of his position.

Noridet stared at this problematical being who, perhaps, held the key of the mysteries which he was so anxious to solve, and suddenly he saw the steward stand aside to admit a personage who could only be his master. Indeed, a man of lofty stature could be seen in the darkened box, seating himself in a leisurely manner, with his back to the stage while he arranged his opera-glass. Noridet could as yet only distinguish his black hair and broad forehead, and he was concentrating all his attention upon his brow, when suddenly the box screen was lowered and the stranger appeared in the full light.

Noridet had only just time to draw back into the slips. He had just recognised Count d'Alcarno. The great Italian nobleman was none other than M. Lugos.

The mystery was being cleared up, and Noridet might, without boasting, flatter himself that luck was decidedly in his favour. He was now sure that M. Lugos played more than one part, and it did not seem very difficult to unravel the tangled thread of his complex personality. If, as seemed almost certain, M. Bernard was the confidant of this pretended Count d'Alcarno, the proofs of Noridet's crime and the copy of the will were probably in his hands. So it was only necessary to rob him of these documents either by cunning or by sheer force.

When once he, Noridet, had gained possession of these dangerous papers, he meant to get rid of M. Lugos in some way or other. Before aught else, it was important for him to hide himself; so he left this part of the slips, where he might eventually be espied by the stranger. Having gone round the stage, passing behind the scenery in the rear, he stationed himself in the slips on the same side as M. Lugos. By following this course, he was no longer to be seen by his enemy; but the advantage of this new position was neutralized by the fact that, on his own side, he lost sight of his foe. The manager, who had not forgotten Noridet, whom he hoped to secure as a partner, now relieved him of his difficulties by offering him a place in his own box, which overlooked the stage within the curtain. Noridet had already remarked that this nook—a very uncomfortable one—adjoined the box occupied by M. Lugos, so he immediately accepted the offer. The manager installed him in this retreat, with all sorts of complimentary protestations, and then went off to attend to his business, leaving the young millionaire to himself.

Merely a flimsy partition now separated Noridet from the man whom he wished to spy upon, and he resolved to begin doing so. He took care to keep in the rear of the box, which was very dark, and he began examining both with his hands and eyes the fragile wood-work which prevented him from seeing and hearing M. Lugos. This time again chance served him.

The proscenium-box communicated with the manager's nook by a small door hidden in the wood-work, and, on careful examination, Noridet ended by discovering a narrow slit which might be used as a means both for observation and hearing. He could, without leaving his chair, apply his eye or ear to it, and as the nook he occupied was somewhat above the level of the stranger's box, there was no fear of his being seen himself.

He began by looking. The Count d'Alcarno had laid down his opera-glass, after glancing round the theatre, and was reading a letter with great attention. As for M. Bernard, he had probably gone to wait in the lobby till his employer needed him. At least Noridet only saw the Greek profile of

Mademoiselle Impéria, who did not scorn to lean forward from time to time, no doubt in view of attracting the noble Italian's attention.

The first act was about to come to an end. Mademoiselle Argentine, who represented the chief insect of this fantastic kingdom, had just begun singing, very much out of tune, a verse couched in infamous doggerel, and set to abominable music :—

“ I'm the Scarabee bright,
And I glitter by night,
Oh ! the queen of the insects am I ;
And it is such a sight—
It nonplusses you quite,
When I open my pinions to fly ! ”

Thus sung the leading lady of the Fantaisies, and young Alfred, overcome with admiration, leant back in his stall, and punctuated the last lines of this remarkable effusion by enthusiastic stamping. He, indeed, applauded with his voice, his hands, his feet, and his cane, while the handsome Vergoncy contented himself with expressing his admiration with the tips of his white-gloved fingers.

Argentine wore in her ears the diamonds which had cost M. Brossin's heir so dear, but she paid very little attention to her foolish admirer, and turned all the fire of her eyes upon the proscenium-box occupied by Count d'Alcamo, who, however, appeared to pay no attention to her glances.

The curtain fell a moment later, and Noridet, who had not left his post, now saw M. Lugos bowing in the direction of the Brossins' box. Soon afterwards the door opened noisily, and Baron Brossin entered.

Noridet's attention increased, and he applied his ear to the slit in the wood-work.

“ Well ! my dear count,” said M. Brossin, in that tone at once familiar and self-important, to which parvenus are so addicted, “ have you had any news from Sicily ? ”

“ All goes well,” replied Count d'Alcamo, in a slightly disdainful tone. “ I have some good news to tell you.”

“ As regards our great affair ? ”

“ Exactly.”

The baron, who did not probably care to take Impéria into the secrets of his business matters, made a sign to the count to lower his voice, and came nearer to the very partition, behind which Noridet was listening. This enabled the young fellow to hear what was said all the more distinctly.

“ Our demand for a concession has some chance of success, then ? ”

“ The concession is granted. I received official news to that effect this morning.”

“ Ah, my dear count,” said Brossin, enthusiastically, “ how can I thank you ? ”

“ There is no occasion for thanks, since I share the profits. I soon hope to double the million which I have placed in your hands.”

“ Double, my dear friend ! triple is what you ought to say. I will explain a little practical combination to you ; you will see how I understand business. But we will talk it all over at Monville, for the baroness fully relies upon your coming, and your room is ready at the château.”

“ Indeed ! I have very little time at my disposal. Besides, baron, I am here, as you know, on a secret mission, and I avoid society.”

“ But there will be nobody to visit us. Two or three petty squires, the lords of a few acres, who don't amount to much. Then there will be Monsieur

de Noridet, a charming young man who has just come into three millions, and who, between ourselves, would be just the husband for *Henriette*. That is all."

"Ah, indeed! Well, I will join you there, but for three or four days only, at the utmost. Meanwhile, baron, I must go to pay my respects to the ladies." Saying this, the Count d'Alcamo rose and left the box with *M. Brossin*, who, on his way, favoured the beautiful *Impéria* with a gesture of friendly patronage.

Noridet was decidedly in luck. He had obtained more information in five minutes than he had secured in a month. He no longer wandered laphazard along the perilous road upon which his crime had placed him, and a definite plan was now maturing in his brain, over-excited by a sense of danger. The count was about to repair to the château of *Monville*, leaving *M. Bernard* in Paris to watch over the proofs he held against him—*Noridet*. The latter immediately made up his mind.

"While you are in Normandy," he muttered to himself, "I will get the better of your hireling; as soon as I have destroyed the papers I will join you at *Brossin's*, and then, *Monsieur Lugos*, we will have it out between us."

This project was defective in one respect. It was by no means impossible for *Jules* to rid himself of *M. Bernard* first, and of his master afterwards, but it was necessary in the first place to discover where the terrible documents were deposited. To ascertain that, *Noridet* relied to some extent upon chance and also upon his own acumen. Time was passing, but he had at least twenty-four hours before him to prepare his plans. He once more began watching and listening. The count came back to his box, and *M. Bernard* with him. During the stranger's absence *Impéria* had left her seat, either because she also had a visit to pay among the audience, or because she found the performance tiresome. *M. Lugos* was therefore able to speak with his steward without being overheard by her.

Noridet redoubled his attention.

"Pierre, there is some news," said the foreigner, in a tone of friendly familiarity.

"What is it, sir, pray?"

"I am going to-morrow to Normandy with the *Brossin* family. It must be so. I want to watch that rascal, *Noridet*, closely. I have reasons for fearing that he will escape me."

"Pray, be careful, sir," said *Bernard*, shaking his head.

"Don't be afraid, *Pierre*, I shall take my precautions. Besides, I shall take you with me."

"I, sir? But the papers, the papers!" now rejoined the steward.

"We sha'n't be absent for more than three days, and how can you suppose that any one would think of looking for the papers in the hiding-place you have devised?"

"The fact is that to discover them at my workshop in the *Rue Vanneau*, and under my anvil would need positive sorcery. Besides, it would be necessary to lift a ton's weight, and remove the tiles besides."

"Yes; it is absolutely impossible for *Noridet* to do that, and, besides, he can have no suspicion in that quarter. I tell you of our departure now, in order that you may bid your daughter good-bye to-night."

"I think we had better take the papers with us, sir," said *Bernard*, scratching his ear.

"No, no; with *Monsieur Noridet* in the same house, it would, on the contrary, be very imprudent. I prefer to leave them under your anvil."

"No doubt ; you are right, sir ; besides, I have an idea of my own as an additional precaution."

"Very well, Pierre, it is understood ; but you have none too much time, my friend. Go and attend to what you have to do, and come to me early to-morrow, at the Grand Hôtel."

The steward bowed respectfully, and retired. The curtain rose again, and the Count d'Alcamo quietly took up his opera-glass.

Noridet had not lost a word of the conversation, and he did not need to learn any more. He left the manager's box and darted into the slips in search of Fortoto, but the latter was on the stage—still dressed as a stag-beetle, and leading a troop of frightful-looking coleoptera in an assault upon the "Palace of the Butterflies," defended by a swarm of charming bees. Noridet was obliged to wait for the end of the encounter, but when the assailants had been put to flight, he accosted the mulatto, and said to him in a low tone : "I am going. Make haste to finish, and meet me. I have something to say to you."

"There are still seven scenes to come, and I don't know whether I shall be allowed to leave before the end."

"Do the best you can, and try not to make me wait too long."

"Is it so very pressing, Monsieur Jules?"

"Very pressing indeed, and if you wish to earn the money you need to set up housekeeping, you ought not to lose a moment."

"Oh, in that case," exclaimed Fortoto, "the manager may do the best he can. I have already told him that I should leave him this very evening. For my own part, I have only to figure in the scene of the 'Invasion of the Cockchafers,' and the great transformation. I will hand over my costume to a fellow who is dying to get my place, and they may all get out of the scrape as best they can. The 'invasion' will be badly conducted, but the dandies will like it just as well ; they come here for the girls, and not for us fellows."

"All right ! where will you meet me?"

"In ten minutes' time I will be at the Café Oscar, at the corner of the boulevard."

Noridet slipped out through the battalion of women, who were waiting in the slips to make their entrance, and succeeded in reaching the stage-door again, after running the fire of several pairs of bewitching eyes, which he did not notice.

As soon as he had set foot in the street, his ideas became strangely clear. He grasped not only the general features, but the smallest details of the task he was about to undertake. For the first time, chance gave him an advantage over M. Lugos ; for the first time this execrated foe, who had always guessed Noridet's intentions in advance, had exposed his own plans. It was the time now, if ever, to run every risk to gain everything. He went slowly along the Boulevard du Temple, and soon found the somewhat gloomy Café Oscar. This establishment was full of ill-clad customers, including numerous supers from minor theatres. As Noridet thought it imprudent to show himself there with Fortoto, he contented himself with walking up and down the pavement in front.

The mulatto soon appeared. He had donned plain clothes, and came quickly along like a man who is gladdened by some happy prospect. Noridet went towards him, and without allowing him time to question him, took his arm and drew him towards the Place du Château d'Eau. The wind had risen and was sweeping the dry leaves along ; a fall of rain

seemed likely, and there were but few passers-by, so that the spot was well chosen for a private chat. Noridet, who had all the qualities of a conspirator, glanced around him, selected a double bench, sat down on one side of it, and told Fortoto to install himself on the opposite side. Aurora's son, as an ex-police agent, readily understood the reason of this precaution. They could see whatever persons might approach on either side, and act accordingly.

"I told you before," began Noridet, without further preamble, "that I wished to have some information about a certain person, and that I would give you ten thousand francs if you would obtain it for me."

"That is too much money, Monsieur Jules; and if it were not on account of Louise, I can assure you that I should be only too glad to serve you without payment."

"Too much! You don't know what you are saying, my poor Fortoto, for I haven't yet explained anything to you. Don't protest before you know what I want."

"I don't care if I have to risk my life, as it concerns you, and—"

"Louise Bernard? I don't doubt that," replied Noridet, smiling; "but there is no risk of life involved. I only require experience and skill such as you possess."

"As for that, Monsieur Jules, you may rely upon me. I am well known in the 'force,' and for watching a house, making a doorkeeper talk, or tracking any one, I haven't my equal."

"It isn't that which you will have to do."

"I thought that you wanted information," said Fortoto, much surprised.

"Yes, but I have the information now."

"Then you don't need me, Monsieur Jules?" said Fortoto, very anxiously.

"More than ever, on the contrary. I have the information: that is, I know where it can be got at."

"Then you want—"

"I want you to take some papers containing it from the spot where they are concealed in a certain house. I must have them as soon as possible."

"Indeed," stammered the mulatto, "but how can I take them away? Is the house occupied?"

"I will tell you where they are," said Noridet, pretending not to understand the reason of Fortoto's hesitation.

"So I must go in at night, and force—"

"Ah, yes! 'burglary,' 'sealing walls at night-time,' and all that sort of thing. You know the law, and you are afraid of committing yourself. I have nothing to say to all these scruples, and if you think that I intend to risk being sent to the galleys in your company, let us say no more. I shall easily find some one not so stupid as yourself."

"Excuse me, Monsieur Jules, excuse me," said poor Fortoto, whose head was beginning to whirl. "I must be crazy, for I am quite sure that you don't wish me to commit a crime."

"I will take pity on your perplexity, and explain my reasons to you. Accept or refuse, when you have heard me, but let us finish with the matter at once."

Fortoto listened attentively.

"In two words," continued Noridet, "the thing is this: I have an enemy—a powerful enemy—who pursues me and mine with his hatred. He has succeeded in stealing some papers from me which compromise my

father—who brought you up and educated you, as you remember, Fortoto—and he intends making use of them to injure me seriously. I may as well tell you exactly how. His object in all this is to break off my marriage with a person I am greatly attached to.”

“He must be an abominable scoundrel,” said Fortoto, in all simplicity.

“Abominable, indeed; that is the very word that suits him,” quietly replied Noridet. “Now, as regards these papers which he has stolen from me I have a right, I flatter myself, to secure possession of them by all possible means, and I beg of you to believe that if I could do it myself I wouldn’t apply to you, but simply kill the scoundrel. However, I should not like to give rise to scandal which would damage my reputation.”

“I should kill him also if I were in your place,” cried Fortoto, carried away by his foster-brother’s eloquence.

“There is no need of that. It will be quite enough for me to get possession of my papers again. Now, will you help me or not?”

“Yes, a thousand times yes, Monsieur Jules!”

“I begin by giving you my word of honour that no money is concealed at the place where I wish to send you; there are only some documents. Your honesty runs no risk.”

“I believe you, Monsieur Jules, I believe you,” said the unfortunate Fortoto, carried away by these deceitful words and fine phrases.

“Then we agree, and I can speak plainly,” said Noridet, with great seriousness.

“I would go to the infernal regions after the papers, if need be,” said Fortoto, who was trying to work himself into a state of enthusiasm so as to forget the warnings of his conscience.

“There is no need of going so great a distance,” said Noridet. “You have only to go to the Rue Vanneau, at the corner of the Rue de Sèvres.”

After making this statement in an off-hand manner, Noridet stopped short and looked his foster-brother straight in the face.

The moment was a critical one. Everything depended upon whether Fortoto was ignorant of M. Bernard’s complex personality and where his workshop was located. Perhaps Louise herself, the daughter of the problematical steward, knew nothing of all this; and if, indeed, her father had told her anything concerning it, it was probable that she had kept it to herself. Still despite all Noridet’s reasoning to this effect, he might, of course, be mistaken, and he felt anxious for a moment as he mentioned the Rue Vanneau. But Fortoto had not stirred, and his face did not express either surprise or curiosity. He merely said quietly: “I know that part of Paris as well as I do the ‘slips’ at the Fantaisies.”

“Then you must know where the house is. It is entered by a dark passage with a little yard on the right; there is no doorkeeper, but a little blacksmith’s workshop at the other end.”

“I know it. I have often gone in there when it rained. The passage is always open.”

“Yes, it is always open, and you can easily get in without being noticed. You see, my dear fellow, that there is no ‘burglary,’ or scaling walls, or ‘breaking in’ about this. The only man who works in the shop will be absent for three or four days, so that the building cannot be qualified as ‘occupied.’”

“The papers are in the smith’s workshop, then?”

“Yes; and the place isn’t badly chosen, for I should never have gone there in search of my papers, had I not received certain information; how-

ever, I am at present positively sure that they are there. This is what you must do: In the first place, wait till you receive a letter from me."

"Are you going away?"

"Yes, I am going to-morrow to Baron Brossin's place in the country, the Château of Monville, near Dieppe, where I shall stay a week. Can you remember the address?"

"It is part of my business to have a good memory, you know."

"You must wait here for my orders. I will send them by telegram, and we will agree how to write so as to understand one another without letting anyone else into the secret."

"That is a wise precaution."

"For instance, I will telegraph to you: 'Begin the vintage at Chevreuse.' On the evening after you receive my telegram this is what you will have to do: You must slip into the passage at dusk, and hide behind the boards in the yard until night. When you think the opportunity favourable, you must open the window of the shop—an easy matter—and go in. You will find no one. I'll answer for that, and you won't require any light. Take a pair of pincers and a short iron bar with you. The anvil is in the middle of the workshop. You can raise it with your bar, and when you have done so loosen the tiles underneath. The papers are under them. You must take them out, replace the tiles and the anvil, and then you can get out as easily as you will get in."

"What am I to do with the papers when I have secured possession of them?" asked Fortoto.

"You must go to a telegraph office, without losing a moment, and send me a telegram saying: 'The vintage is just over.'"

X.

THE Château of Monville was formerly a feudal castle, with turrets, loopholes, a drawbridge, and a moat. It was the cradle of an old Norman family, the elder branch of which followed William the Conqueror to England; while the younger branch remained in France and gradually declined after the eleventh century, finally falling from its high station. Ruined by the perpetual wars of the Norman dukes, the Monvilles lost both their property and their rank. Richelieu gave them a final blow by demolishing the ramparts of the château, and if the Revolution of 1789 did not take away either their lands or their privileges it was because the Monvilles had become petty farmers for many years already. The last of the name, careless of his ancestry, set off bravely as a volunteer during the first Republic, went through all the wars of the Empire, and returned, after the battle of Waterloo, to live on the little farm belonging to his father.

But though families pass away, lands remain, and the lordly domain of Monville had found a purchaser towards the end of the reign of Louis XV. A business man who had become rich bought the forest, together with the ruined manor, and, charmed by the beauty of the site, raised between the woods and the sea a beautiful château, which in its turn had many vicissitudes. It passed successively through the hands of an opera-dancer, an army-contractor, and a calico manufacturer, and finally became the property of Baron Brossin, who paid half a million francs for it, enlarged it, and embellished it considerably. He went there every autumn, and, being

a candidate for the neighbouring constituency he had to receive a deal of company, to the great delight of his wife and daughter.

The financier was a lucky man, and it would have been difficult to find from Dieppe to Tréport a more lovely abode than Monville. Built upon the high cliffs which shelter Normandy, the château overlooked an immense panorama. To the north a fresh sward stretched to the summit of the precipitous rocks, at the feet of which the waves beat angrily; on the south a park, laid out in English fashion, blended with the forest. On one side stretched the sea; on the other, oaks, hundreds of years old, rose up in all their majestic pride. This frame did not harmonise with the architecture of the modern château, but it was admirably suited to the old castle, which the baron had rightly allowed to stand, and which still rose up with its damaged walls beyond the stables.

The wild picturesqueness of the landscape was little understood by the present owners of Monville. The Brossin family thought a deal more of the gilding in the great Louis XV. reception-room, and the splendours of the dining-room hung with Cordova leather, than of the sunsets which every evening tinged the blue waves of the channel with a purple glow. The ladies brought the style of the Boulevard Haussmann to the seaside, and a stay in the country was to them nothing more than a chance to display some new toilets, or an occasion to make fun of their country guests of both sexes. They seldom indulged either in walks on the beach or excursions into the forest. They limited themselves to enjoying the fine autumn evenings, by seating themselves after dinner under an open verandah which looked out upon the sea. The men smoked there, and talked politics or agriculture, while the ladies indulged in frivolous small talk.

Three days after the memorable performance of the "Golden Scarabec," there was a gay and brilliant gathering on the terrace. The guests had just left table, and had scattered into little groups, according to their tastes and preferences. The baroness sat in the midst of a circle of women, and had drawn into her orbit the handsome Vergoncey, who helped her to show off her by no means youthful attractions: Young Alfred was astonishing two worthy men from Dieppe with an account of his love affairs with various Parisian actresses, and his listeners, who only saw Paris once in two years, were, naturally, immensely edified. M. Brossin was holding forth on the cultivation of buckwheat with a landowner of the vicinity; while as for Mademoiselle Henriette, she had just lit a Turkish cigarette, to the utter horror of the Normandy dowagers, and was beginning an animated chat in a corner with Jules Noridet, who had arrived at the château on the evening before.

Alfred's sister belonged to that class of young ladies who never miss either a race or a first night at the theatre, who know the names of all the "Ladies of the Lake," and who merely look upon marriage as a means of possessing an eight-spring carriage and a box at the opera. She was romantic, but her romance needed to be located amid rich and elegant surroundings. Her beauty was open to criticism like her mind, but dress and assurance took the place of the attractions which she lacked. A dark-eyed blonde, she made her complexion appear whiter by a liberal use of rice powder. Her waist was still flexible, but, unfortunately, she was growing unduly stout. On the other hand, she possessed that indescribable ease of manner which is only to be acquired in certain Parisian circles. She was not pretty; but many men would have found her attractive.

Noridet himself, although hardened by experience against artificial

charms, had not been altogether able to resist the spell, and, in spite of his bitter thoughts, he willingly yielded that evening to his inclination to learn something more about this eccentric girl.

"Look over there, near my mother, at the woman in green, with a yellow head-dress! Don't you think that she looks like a parrot?" said Henriette, with a loud laugh.

"That is because the people in Normandy haven't got Worth to dress them. Is it he who created the toilet you wear this evening?"

"Do you like it?" asked Mademoiselle Brossin, eagerly.

"It is perfectly charming."

"So much the better! I put it on to please you."

"To please me?" replied Noridet, somewhat startled by this abrupt attack.

"Whom do you think that I care to please, if not you? Those peasants in their 'Sunday clothes' that my father has invited, or the Count d'Alcamo? He is capable of appreciating my attire; but he is too old, and I don't care anything for him."

"In that case," replied Noridet, laughing, "I am less fortunate than I thought myself. You only wish to please me because there is no other conquest to be made here."

"What do you know of that?" said Henriette, listlessly watching the blue smoke which curled up from her cigarette.

"Nothing, mademoiselle, but if I did—"

"What then?"

"I should tell you that it was useless to try to please me."

"And why, pray?"

"Because you please me already," said Noridet, lowering his voice.

Henriette's dark eyes sparkled for an instant, but that was all.

"Have you still those two bays that you drove last winter? They are rather small for your large brougham," resumed the heiress, with the most perfect composure.

"Yes, mademoiselle, I have them still," said Noridet, "but I intend to part with them on my wedding-day."

"Come here, my dear Jules," exclaimed Baron Brossin at this moment. "The Count d'Alcamo insists upon offering you some cigars which he has brought direct from Havana."

The stranger was, indeed, now coming forward with the politest air imaginable, and he offered his hand to Noridet with skilfully assumed cordiality. Jules had not yet spoken to his enemy, who had only arrived at the château in the morning. They had merely seen each other at table, and had simply bowed after the usual introduction. Noridet did not even know whether the steward, Bernard, had accompanied his master to Monville, a question which greatly interested him.

"What a magnificent night, sir!" now said Count d'Alcamo; "it reminds me of our fine evenings in Sicily, and we really ought to go and smoke on the lawn instead of choking the ladies with our tobacco here."

"That is an excellent idea, count," said Noridet, eagerly.

"For my part, gentlemen, I am afraid of the dampness, so I must beg you to go and contemplate the moonlight by yourselves," said M. Brossin, with a coarse laugh.

"As you please, baron," replied the stranger; "but I shall take Monsieur Noridet with me."

The count had not exaggerated. The night was very warm and clear for

this northern climate, and two real friends would have enjoyed a cozy chat on the wide path which bordered the cliff. The waves rolled softly over the shingle on the strand, and the voices of the guests talking on the terrace, were wafted to the spot in a confused murmur. Noridet and the count walked on side by side without speaking or looking at one another for some minutes. Each seemed to wait for the other to begin.

"I must thank you," the stranger curtly said at last.

"For having come to Monville? You ordered me to do so, and you know that I am forced to obey you," said Noridet, bitterly.

"I have to thank you for not recognising me as Mousieur Lugos, when I was introduced to you as Count d'Alcamo."

Noridet shrugged his shoulders without replying.

"Oh, I know that you have a great deal of coolness, but you might have been taken aback and have shown it."

"What does your true name matter to me?" said Noridet, delighted at acquiring the certainty that the stranger was not aware that he had spied upon him at the Fantaisies.

"Not much, that's true," said the count; "and since you do not care for my thanks, I will pass to the directions which I have to give you."

Noridet's attention increased, though he assumed an air of indifference.

"Do you guess why I wished you to come here?"

"I am waiting for you to tell me."

"That is right. I had you come to Monville to marry Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin."

Noridet did not start. He had foreseen this order, and wished to show no surprise. "Very well," said he, with the utmost composure. "I am ready to marry her, and I authorise you to solicit her hand for me."

"That would be useless and absurd. Absurd, because I am not supposed to be acquainted with you, and useless, because Mademoiselle Henriette would refuse."

"Do you think so?" asked Noridet, in an ironical tone. He was thinking of his conversation on the terrace.

"I am sure of it. She will only accept as a husband a man bold enough to propose to her himself, and strong enough to master her."

"Then you virtually order me to seduce Mademoiselle Brossin. How many days do you allow me?"

"Three—"

"The deuce! That's flattering for me—but scarcely polite as regards herself."

"You must persuade her to elope with you, and you will succeed by telling her that elopements are the fashion in England among the aristocracy, and that it is the custom in the highest circles to be married in that way."

Noridet seemed to reflect. "However eccentric Mademoiselle Brossin may be," he said at last, "there must be an opportunity for me to carry her off, or else how am I to do so?"

"There will be one. You know that there is to be an excursion to the Biville Cliffs. You must propose to the ladies to proceed along the beach. I will undertake to get the baron away by the inland path, and as my steward is coming to-night to the château"—at this Noridet started—"I will tell him to have a post-chaise ready at the end of the village. The rest is your business. You have all day to conquer the scruples of a mad-cap girl who already likes you. It seems to me that there is nothing very disagreeable about the matter."

"And if I succeed?"

"Why on the day when you become Baron Brossin's son-in-law, I will hand you back the will which your uncle signed," said M. Lugos, gravely.

"I hope to have it without marrying that 'Demoiselle Benoiton,'" thought Noridet, while replying: "It is understood."

"Very well. Now, I think that we should do as well to go back to the ladies. I will give you your final instructions to-morrow."

"To-morrow," thought Noridet, as he walked slowly back towards the château, "to-morrow your Bernard will be here, the blacksmith's workshop in the Rue Vanneau will be deserted, and a telegram will order Fortoto to begin the vintage!"

The evening passed without any other incident, and Noridet awoke in the morning with a fear that the day would prove a long one. He had pretended to submit to the count's orders merely so as to gain time. It was not without apprehension that he saw the time coming for violent measures. He had made up his mind, in point of fact, not to embarrass his future life by carrying off Henriette Brossin. This eccentric young girl merely inspired him with curiosity, and, besides, he experienced some repugnance at the thought of this odious proceeding. Though he had not hesitated to poison his uncle, he recoiled from carrying off a young girl, and hoped to get out of M. Lugos's clutches in some other way. To rebel against his tyranny he only waited for Fortoto to obtain possession of the deposit in the Rue Vanneau, and that, he thought, was near at hand.

Rising at dawn, Noridet went to the stables, ascertained from a groom that Count d'Alcamo's steward had arrived during the night, and then had a horse saddled for him. An hour later he was at Dieppe, at the telegraph office, and dispatched the telegram in the terms agreed upon. The horse which he had chosen trotted smartly, and he returned to Monville before noon, in time for breakfast.

Mademoiselle Brossin had organised life in the English style at Monville, and the guests were entirely free to do as they pleased till dinner-time. Except the obligation to appear at dinner in a dress coat and a white tie, every one could do what suited him, whether shooting, reading, smoking, or strolling all day. The ladies of the château seldom appeared at table in the morning, and Noridet was somewhat surprised, when, on entering the dining-room, he saw Mademoiselle Henriette seated with a cup of tea before her. Her mother, absorbed, no doubt, in the complicated mysteries of an elaborate toilet, had failed to appear, and the young girl's only companion was the Count d'Alcamo. Both he and she were in high good humour, and were pitilessly criticising the guests of the evening before.

Noridet had no difficulty in joining in the talk, and soon a fierce battery was opened "all along the line" upon the unlucky people who lived near the château. Henriette displayed all the resources of a mind fertile in wicked wit, and paraded all her indifference and disdain for the opposite sex. Her aim was very easily realised by Noridet, who knew that she was beginning to flirt with him, and he put himself upon his guard, accordingly. "Isn't it true, count," said the madcap heiress of the baron, "that an intelligent woman cannot love a man who dresses like everybody else, and pays compliments of the most commonplace sort at every turn?"

"I am afraid, mademoiselle," said the stranger, laughing, "that experience may some day prove the reverse to you."

"Never! never!" cried Henriette, swallowing a piece of cake with evident appetite, "I don't wish to have a commonplace lover."

"Then you must come among the mountains of Sicily. You will find bearded young fellows there who sleep in the open air and pass their lives firing at the soldiers who come to arrest them."

"Brigands! Oh, no. I should think that I was seeing 'Fra Diavolo' played at the Opéra Comique. We have something better than that here, on the spot."

"Indeed! Is it a pirate or a smuggler?"

"Nothing of the kind. It is the lawful descendant of the old lords of Monville, who formerly conquered England, Sicily, Palestine, and a great many other countries," gravely replied Mademoiselle Brossin.

"How is it that this noble individual isn't a guest at the château?"

"The noble individual in question runs about barefooted on the cliffs, and passes his time in looking for sea-birds' nests and killing my father's deer."

"Bless me! here is a hero of romance right at your hand."

"Why not?" asked the young girl, looking Noridet full in the face. "Do you know that we lead a rather dull life here, and that I would do almost anything rather than live as though we were at Saint-Cloud or Anteuil?"

"Oh, mademoiselle, you calumniate your father's château!" exclaimed the count. "You are forgetting our excursion to Biville. To-morrow we shall see the sea, the beach, the great rocks."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Henriette, rising, "why to-morrow? I should like to go to-day."

"I ask nothing better, but I fear that your mother may object," said Alcamo, with a glance at Noridet.

"Oh, Monsieur Vergoncey will persuade her," said Henriette, "and I will go to let my father know, so that he may have the open carriage got ready."

"But, mademoiselle—"

"It is settled! We will send our servants to Biville with the break. We will dine on the grass, beside the precipice. The other people can go in the carriage, and we will walk along by the sea, on foot. I am going to get ready. You will see! I shall provide myself with Russian boots, red stockings, a Louis XVI. hat, and a high alpenstock."

Henriette thereupon ran off like a crazy creature, and the two guests remained alone. This change of plan greatly annoyed Noridet, who was thus obliged to make up his mind before receiving news from Fortoto, but he made no outward sign, and watched the count, trying to read his thoughts on his calm countenance.

"Why shouldn't it be to-day?" said the Count d'Alcamo, after a moment's reflection. "I have still time enough to let my steward know of the change, and as for you, I suppose you are ready?"

"To obey you to-day, or to obey you to-morrow, matters very little to me; but I very much doubt whether Mademoiselle Brossin will act in a manner to suit your plans," replied Noridet, fully determined to postpone the elopement on some pretext or other.

"I have no doubt on that score whatever," said the count; "especially after hearing her talk just now," he added. "But listen attentively to what I have to say." Noridet raised his head. "The post-chaise will be at four o'clock precisely, at the first turn in the road which leads from the beach at Biville, behind a crag called 'The Black Rock,' which you will easily find. I rely entirely upon your intelligence to persuade Mademoiselle Brossin to run away with you," added the stranger, rising.

"Excuse me," said Noridet, "but in case I succeed, where do you wish me to go?"

"Anywhere you please, to Paris, Germany, Italy—it is a matter of the most perfect indifference to me, providing you make such arrangements as must end in your marriage with this girl. I will undertake to make the baron consent to the marriage when necessary."

"But if I don't succeed?"

"You must try again," quietly replied the count, leaving the dining-room.

"Very well," muttered Noridet when he found himself alone. "I will make arrangements to miss the post-chaise at Biville, and I shall get off with a mere flirtation with this feather-headed girl. No! no! I sha'n't try again," Monsieur Lugos! To-morrow, I shall receive Fortoto's telegram; to-morrow, I shall be free, and then—"

If the count could have seen the threatening gesture now made by his rebellious slave, he would probably have taken his precautions as regarded the morrow, but he was busy at the stables giving some orders to his steward. "You understand me, Pierre?" he said to M. Bernard, who listened attentively, "you will remain and watch the postillions until you see Monsieur Noridet get into the post-chaise. He will arrive at about four o'clock, but you must wait all the evening, and even all night, if necessary."

"I understand, count. I left the travelling chaise at the last stage on the road to Dieppe. I will walk to the stage, which is about a league from here, and no one at the château will know anything about it."

"All right, my good Pierre! Did all go well in Paris when you left?" asked the count, lowering his voice.

"There is nothing to fear, sir: I have taken my precautions, and I am as easy in mind as though I were still at the Rue Vameau in person."

The Count d'Alcorno thanked his steward with a friendly glance, and hastened to join Baron Brossin, who was already walking up and down the lawn with a majestic air, like some noble lord treading the soil of his ancestral domain.

"Well, my dear count," said the financier, "you know that the programme for the day has been changed? We are going to pic-nic at Biville, and I will show you my new plantations. I shall take you with me in the open carriage."

"Willingly, baron! I confess that I don't care to go on foot. I am not up to that, although the ladies are going in that way."

"Oh, they will find escorts enough, and, between ourselves," added M. Brossin, with a confidential air, "I sha'n't be sorry to give Monsieur Jules a chance to pay his court to Henriette. A man with three millions isn't to be sneered at, even by my daughter, and I sha'n't refuse my consent if the young people suit one another."

"Monsieur Noridet is a very honourable and distinguished man," said the stranger, gravely.

"Then, my dear count, you would approve of such a marriage?"

"Entirely, since you do me the honour to ask me for my opinion."

"All is for the best, then. Ah! there are the young couple now, and they look as though they understood one another wonderfully well."

Henriette had just appeared at the door of the château, and seemed to be holding a very animated conversation with Jules Noridet. She had donned a toilet which had proved a great success at such fashionable watering-

places as Dieppe and at Trouville. Her short skirt, her high boots, and her plumed hat, made her look somewhat like a sutler-girl in the Gardes Françaises. The baroness followed, escorted by the inevitable Vergoncey, and wearing a costume which was almost as eccentric as her daughter's. Young Alfred brought up the rear, yawning, so as to show everybody that he would rather be in Paris with Argentine.

"Are you coming with us along the beach, count?" called Henriette to Alcamo.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle, I am one of the 'serious persons,' and you decided at breakfast that the 'serious' persons should go in the carriage."

"In that case," said the young girl, "I shall go with my mother, Monsieur Noridet, Monsieur Vergoncey, and Alfred."

"No, no, not with me," yawned the dandy, "I have an appointment at Dieppe."

"Letters for the gentlemen," now said a servant, bringing in a silver tray, on which lay several missives which the postman had just left. There was one for Noridet, and having broken the seal, he eagerly read: "Monsieur Jules—I write to say that all is going well. I went to the yard in question under pretence of buying some boards, and I examined the workshop. It will be an easy matter, and as soon as I receive your telegram, the matter will be attended to. I am impatiently awaiting orders, for I have not seen Louise for three days past, not liking to go out at a time when the telegraph-boy might come. You may count upon your very humble and obedient servant, FORTOTO."

The date was that of the day before, and Noridet put the note in his pocket with lively satisfaction. "I no longer fear you," he muttered, with a glance at M. Lugos.

Henriette was already darting along the path which led from the park to the strand. "Who loves me follows me!" she called out to Noridet.

This path had been hewn in the rock and was very steep. Henriette, whose high-heeled boots did not prevent her from running along as swiftly as a mountain goat, had already reached the beach, while the majestic baroness was still walking with difficulty along the height, leaning on the arm of the handsome Vergoncey. Noridet was a few steps ahead of this ill-matched pair, and a tall footman brought up the rear. The sky was clear, although to the south-east the wind drove some little ruddy clouds over the sun with strange rapidity. Toward the west, too, the horizon was reddening and the sea had a greenish tinge. The beach stretched along, gradually diminished in breadth by the rising tide. The fishing-boats were spreading full canvas to reach Dieppe, and the gulls swept over the waves uttering a sound that resembled a human wail.

Only Parisians would have failed to see that a change in the weather was impending; but the ladies in spite of their annual sojourn at Monville knew no more about the sea than if they had never gone beyond Asnières. As for Noridet, instead of looking at the sky, he was admiring Mademoiselle Brossin, who was perched in a boldly picturesque attitude upon a rock, and leaning upon her long cane, like some heroine of the time of the Fronde. Her face lacked the immutable beauty of a Greek statue; it varied, on the contrary, with provoking facility, and one was obliged to admit, on looking at her, that she was not always pretty. That day, by chance, however, she looked positively charming.

"Monsieur Jules! Monsieur Jules!" she cried, as soon as Noridet

set foot on the beach, "do you intend to keep pace with my mother? If so, I warn you that I am going off alone, and shan't stop until I reach Biville."

"Then you are not afraid of leaving Madame Brossin in this solitary place?" said Noridet, laughing.

"It seems to me that Monsieur Vergoncey will suffice as her escort, without mentioning Jacques, our footman, with his three shawls and two camp-stools. Come, let us go on!" And without waiting for an answer Henriette started off, along the damp sand.

Although Noridet cared but little for a tête-à-tête, he could not, now, help following her. He looked behind him, assured himself that the baroness was not calling them back, and made up his mind to join Henriette, who walked on with surprising rapidity. She was so near the sea that she wet her boots every time a wave dashed a little further forward than its fellows, and this seemed greatly to amuse her; however, she went on towards Biville without saying a word to her escort, or even looking at him. "Is this being done for a wager, mademoiselle?" said Noridet, who, after twenty minutes silent walking, began to think the situation rather ridiculous.

"It is," said Henriette, without stopping.

"Then I should be greatly obliged if you would condescend to explain it to me," said Noridet, feeling vexed.

"Willingly. I made a bet that I would get to Biville an hour before any one else, and, what is more, that I would take you along with me."

"May I ask you with whom you made this bet?"

"Why, with Count d'Alcamo, and I expect to win a beautiful Arabian horse which he brought this summer from Egypt."

Noridet had grown serious at the mention of the count's name. This plot, of which the young girl did not, of course, realise the bearings, made him anxious and irritated him. "Allow me to remark to you, mademoiselle," he said, rather drily, "that the result of this wager depends upon me, and that I am afraid that I shall make you lose it."

"What! are you tired already?" asked Henriette, with a loud laugh.

"It seems to me that you are not much of a walker."

"I am not tired, but I have no idea of lending myself to Count d'Alcamo's whims."

"Nor mine, it appears. Then, you are a good walker, but not a gallant man."

"Gallant by order of that Italian Count? No, Mademoiselle, I am not."

"But if I asked you to go with me, what then?" asked Henriette, suddenly changing her manner.

"Well, mademoiselle," said Noridet, with some embarrassment, "I fear that your mother disapproves our steeple-chase, and I think that we ought to turn back and join her."

"My mother! Why, she must be a league behind us. Don't you see that we have lost her? I should not be surprised if she had made up her mind to return to the château, and take the carriage to Biville."

Noridet turned and saw with great dissatisfaction that Mademoiselle Brossin had spoken truly. The beach was deserted. About half a league away, however, a pile of rocks caught his eye, and it might be that the baroness was coming slowly along from behind this projecting mass. The tide, now rapidly rising, obliged the two young people to draw nearer to the cliffs. The fine sand upon which Henriette had been running was

already covered by the waves, and they would soon have to walk over the shingle at the foot of the chalky wall which arose on their right.

"You mean, then, to let me walk unassisted over these horrid stones?" said Henriette, knocking away a pebble with the tip of her little boot. Her mocking voice had now become coaxing. "I am determined to go on," she added, softly, "and if anything bad happens to me you will have to reproach yourself with having abandoned me."

Noridet cursed his own weakness, and greatly regretted that he had not remained with the handsome Vergonecey, near the respectable baroness, but it was now too late to draw back. "You are right, mademoiselle," said he, curtly. "If you remain alone, a serious accident may happen. Let us walk on, since you wish it; it will, I fancy, be extremely imprudent to linger here."

Henriette's talk, and her mad race over the sand, had for a time sufficiently attracted Noridet's attention to prevent him from noticing what was going on behind them, but the glance which he had cast back in search of the baroness had revealed to him all the danger of their situation. Henriette's inexperience and giddiness had placed them in a position which threatened to have serious results. The tide, one of the highest of the season, had already begun rising when they left the château, and the commonest prudence ought to have made them take the inland road. Noridet, who knew the coast, from having often been to Dieppe, remembered that during the equinoctial tides, the waves came up to the foot of the cliffs, and he calculated that in less than an hour's time the sea would be high. To add to all this, the north-west wind had risen, and was now driving the waves towards the land with incredible violence. There was not a moment to be lost, and it was necessary to advance at any cost, for it was impossible to retreat. The rocks behind which they had left the baroness had already disappeared amid torrents of white foam. In front of them, on the contrary, the way was still free. The coast followed an almost straight line, broken here and there by rocks which jutted out towards the sea. Each of these capes must needs be reached by the tide before the other portion of the cliffs. What they had to do was to get ahead of the tide, and reach the Black Rock, behind which there was the road to Biville. Henriette walked on courageously over the shingle, which slipped away under her boots, but every other minute she lost her equilibrium, and but for the help of her stick, would have fallen. "Take my arm, mademoiselle," said Noridet, who saw that the young girl would presently be unable to advance at all.

She silently accepted, and, thanks to this arrangement, she was able to get on a little faster. However, Noridet himself experienced great difficulty in advancing over the unsteady shingle under his feet. The sea was now perceptibly higher. Still, five hundred yards away the cliffs formed a promontory, which the water had not yet reached. If, behind this cape, the road to Biville was found, all would yet go well.

"Do you know the Black Rock?" suddenly said Noridet. "Is it that one ahead of us?"

"I don't know," said Henriette, "but I see some one over there."

"Where?"

"At the foot of the cliff, a hundred paces from the rock."

"Ah! yes. Two persons, who are walking in the same direction as we are. That is a good sign. If they are going towards the cape, it is clear that there is a way of getting there. Let us try to reach them, and then we shall be safe."

"Yes, let us try," replied Henriette, making one more effort.

At the end of another ten minutes they had got nearer to the people ahead of them.

"They are not fishermen," said Noridet, talking to himself, "but women."

"Women! Yes, you are right; and they are not even fishermen's wives, for I can distinguish their hats and parasols."

"They must be acquainted with the place, however, and can tell us how to find the road. I am going to call to them."

The wind carried the sound of Noridet's voice towards the unknown promenaders, and on hearing it they stopped short. "I am beginning to believe, mademoiselle," said Noridet, "that we shall after all be able to dine 'on the grass' to-night at Biville. You will have only a little fatigue to complain of, and you will win your bet."

"It is strange," said Henriette, without replying to this somewhat premature joke, "but it seems to me that they are making a signal to us. Yes; I am not mistaken, they are waving their handkerchiefs."

Noridet's brow clouded. If the women whom they had espied were also in distress, the encounter was an unlucky one. It is more difficult to save three than one; but there was no possibility of drawing back, or hesitating. Each moment's delay might become fatal. Noridet kept on walking as fast as possible, carrying, rather than supporting, Henriette. This desperate race enabled him to gain ground, and at last he came within a few steps of the unknown women. They had succeeded in gaining a spot which the waves had not yet invaded, and they had stopped there, as though their strength had suddenly given out. Noridet saw that they were leaning against the rocks, in an attitude of utter despair, that one of them was young, the other old, and that both were dressed in mourning.

"Make haste!" he cried, "don't you see that the tide is coming in?"

A cry of anguish from both women came as a reply, and Noridet's agitation was such that he abruptly let go of Henriette's arm. He had just recognised the two ladies. Andrée stood before him. She was pale, with her hair unbound, and near her stood Madame Mornac, gazing at him with eyes in which astonishment, terror, and anger might be read. It seemed as though her surprise had overmastered her fear of danger. Henriette looked on at this silent scene without having strength to utter a word. She had never seen Andrée, but she had met Madame Mornac in society, and dimly realised the painfulness of this strange meeting to all concerned in it. However, the sea recalled the horrors of the position. A monstrous wave broke at their feet, covering them with foam. In three or four minutes more the passage would be closed.

"Let us go on," cried Noridet, "let us go on or we are lost!"

And, himself setting the example, he sprang lightly upon the low rocks which extended in front of the steep cliff, and then held out his hands to the women to enable them to mount. In a few seconds all three had been drawn up to this kind of dyke, including Madame Mornac, who had not ceased grumbling about her own imprudence, and was, no doubt, also enraged at having as her saviour the man whom she detested more than any other in the world. However, they were sheltered for a brief moment, but final safety depended upon their exact position. If the road to Biville lay behind the rocks, there was but a short distance to cover to escape danger. In any case it was necessary to find out where they were. Springing from rock to rock, Noridet soon passed the cape which had hidden the further

stretch of coast, and looked about him. He could not restrain a cry of despair. He saw that the cliffs rose up, sharp, jagged, and threatening, and that the sea already fringed the inaccessible wall with foam. Far away and scarcely discernible, a spot darker than the rest, stood out against the chalky whiteness of the cliff. "It's all over," he murmured, "that's the Black Rock over there, and it would take more than an hour to reach it, especially with women to take care of."

The thought occurred to him to run on alone and try to reach this point, even if towards the end of his course it might be necessary to swim. There was but a glimmer of a chance; still it was the only ray of hope. The instinct of self-preservation arose within him, and the spirit of evil prompted him to commit an infamous act. The women were in his way, and to be rid of them and danger, he only had to save himself and leave them to the mercy of the waves. However, the wind carried a cry of anguish to his ears. "Jules!" cried Henriette, in despair, "Jules! help me, help me!"

He lacked the courage to be a coward. "I will go back," said he, returning; "it is written that my uncle sha'n't have an heir."

The three women were clinging to the slippery stones and trying to resist the furious waves which dashed up against them like soldiers making an assault. Mademoiselle Brossin, wild with terror, could scarcely sustain herself, and the contrast between her showy attire and her livid face and despairing attitude, made her almost ugly. Madame Mornac had knelt down to pray, while Andrée, upright, calm, and resigned, supported her, and encouraged the unhappy Henriette by her words. She seemed like a saint awaiting martyrdom. Devotion is contagious, and the heroic self-abnegation of this young girl strengthened Noridet's determination. He caught hold of Henriette Brossin with one hand, helped Madame Mornac to rise with the other, and calling Andrée by her name, he said, in a firm voice: "You may be able to save us all."

"I am ready," replied the young girl, with simple dignity.

"As you came here for a stroll, you must know the country round about. Where is Biville?"

"There," said Andrée, pointing to the sharpest and steepest part of the cliff, a thousand yards away from them; "but the road by which we came is much further off, beyond the Black Rock. Monsieur Mornac is waiting for us there."

"The sea will be there before we are. If you haven't seen any pathway between us and the foreland it is useless to try to save ourselves. It would be better to die here."

"I did not see any path, but I saw a man on the top of the Biville cliff."

"A man! in this storm of wind! He was a custom-house officer, perhaps?"

"I don't know. He was walking along the edge of the cliff and looking at the sea. Monsieur Mornac's farm isn't far off. He was perhaps a shepherd."

"Well, this man may catch sight of us; we might call out to him, and he might go for help. That is the only hope remaining to us. Let us try."

Henriette was now standing erect, listening eagerly, and without waiting for Noridet to help her, she began to run along the rocks with that fictitious strength which mortal danger lends one. In an instant they had past the foreland and found the beach again. It was time. The waves now covered the spot where they had momentarily halted. Noridet took in the country

at a glance. The coast line curved inward on the right, and a narrow band of shingle remained free between the sea and the cliffs. The tide now came in rather less swiftly, as a sort of dyke was formed by the piles of shingle. The steep part of the cliff which Andrée had pointed out was easily recognised. It rose like a gigantic tower in the midst of a rampart, and, to complete the resemblance, a fissure in the rock had the form of a huge loophole. It was, in point of fact, the historical cliff by which George Cadoudal entered France in 1804—the crevice so well known to smugglers and conspirators. The market-town of Biville could, at the furthest, only be half a league inland, and they might hope to be seen by the peasantry. Moreover, Noridet calculated that Baron Brossin and Count d'Alcamo might have reached the meeting-place, and he hoped that they would take into their heads to stroll about the cliff. They all began to walk on painfully. Noridet at the head with Henriette on his arm. The young girl was scarcely able to hold herself up. Andrée followed with Madame Mornac, and as none of them had the courage to speak, nothing was heard but the dull noise of the waves dashing heavily against the shingle. The path was growing perceptibly narrower. Each wave rolled further forward, and the unfortunate party could note every inch of footing lost to them. They advanced, however, and the cliffs of Biville grew nearer, but Noridet saw that his companion was becoming exhausted. The moment came when it was no longer possible to walk on side by side. If they wished to continue on their way it was necessary to follow one another in single file. "Cling to my shoulders," said Noridet to Henriette.

However, the young girl could no longer sustain herself; her boots were cut to pieces and her feet were bleeding. The pain made her groan aloud. "I would rather die here than go on," she said, sinking down upon the strand.

Still a hundred paces and they would have reached the colossal crevice in the rock. Some goats browsing among the reeds could be distinguished on the summit of the cliff. A moment's delay meant death, slow and hideous death. Noridet turned his eyes away, so as not to behold Henriette's last moments, and he had already started on again when a soft voice called out behind him: "Help us, Monsieur Jules," said Andrée, "help us to carry her."

A young girl had not hesitated to linger while he—a man—fled from danger. He felt ashamed, and he halted.

Henriette, when she was raised and supported, seemed to regain a little energy. Noridet took her in his arms and began to run on, carrying her as though she had been a sleeping child. Madame Mornac followed courageously. Andrée came last of all; hers was the most dangerous position.

There now followed an interval of horrible suffering. The waves were breaking furiously, and the young creole was several times on the point of being carried away by them. But courage imparts both strength and agility. Blinded though she was by the foam, and bruised by the angles of the rocks, Andrée still went on. Suddenly, Noridet halted and laid down his burden. It was now impossible to proceed any further. Ten paces ahead, and behind, the road had disappeared under the waves. Help could only come from above. The steep cliff which rose before their eyes presented a smooth and vertical surface. There was not a projecting stone, not a tuft of grass to clutch at. Noridet called out at the pitch of his voice, raising his head and making a speaking-trumpet of his hands. The echoes of the cliffs re-

peated his cry of despair, and the seagulls, taking refuge upon the rocks, flew round and round, uttering their mournful plaint. Not a human voice replied. The man whom Andrée had espied had without doubt gone away, and the wind roared in from the open sea with such violence that the people of the town must have already summoned their flocks home. A miracle was necessary to bring any one to the verge of this precipice amid the coming tempest.

Noridet felt, this time, that all was indeed lost. The three women clustered about him, Henriette, half dead, Madame Mornac resigned, Andrée still calm and courageous. Suddenly, a strange sight attracted the young fellow's attention. The sea-birds, driven before the storm of wind, came from the open with outspread wings, and, instead of rising to the summit of the cliff, they flew straight into the lofty crevice.

"It must be the crevice found by Georges Cadondal!" cried Noridet, striking his forehead with his clinched hand; and releasing himself from the convulsive clutch of the unfortunate Henriette, he walked on and turned round the rock jutting out a few paces ahead. There he realised why it was that the gulls all flew to this side. All this part of the cliff was pierced with innumerable holes, which served as places of refuge for the sea birds, and scarcely two yards from above the beach, there was the yawning mouth of a cave, which might serve as a refuge even from the highest tide. A little further on, the chalky wall was split from top to bottom as though a giant had parted it with a colossal hatchet. Noridet, clutching at the cliff with his hands wherever any chance of support was offered, finally succeeded in reaching the opening, and saw that this providential cave would shelter several persons within its limits. "This way! this way!" he cried in a loud voice, "we are saved!"

The three women appeared at the turn of the rock. Andrée and Madame Mornac came forward carrying Henriette in their arms. She had fainted. They succeeded in reaching the foot of the cliff, and Noridet, lying down at the entrance of the cavern, stretched out his hands to help them up. "Take her first," said Andrée, raising Henriette's motionless form with one last effort.

Noridet seized hold of the young girl by the shoulders, drew her up, and laid her down inside the grotto.

Mademoiselle Brossin was safe, but the heroic women who had rescued her from death were still upon the beach. A wave dashed against the rock and violently drove them away from it. It seemed as though the angry sea wished to make sure of its prey. Andrée and Madame Mornac, almost overthrown by the shock, could barely drag themselves upon their knees a few yards further on, and then they fell exhausted at the foot of the cliff. The young girl, before closing her eyes in death, gazed once more around. She beheld hundreds of frightened birds flying round and round the huge crevice above her head, and at her feet a mountainous wave rushing up to overwhelm her. Pressing close to Madame Mornac, she no longer tried to clutch at the infractuosités of the rocks, in order to resist the onset of the waves. Noridet was too far off to help her. He had, no doubt, made haste to carry Henriette into the rear part of the cave, for he had not re-appeared. It seemed as if Andrée's last hour had come.

The water, urged forward by the north-west wind, dashed against the coast with a frightful noise. In receding, it drew the two unfortunates into its terrible embrace. Andrée slipped into the gulf; her breath failed her; the blood rung in her ears; and her arms, which clasped Madame

Mornac, were about to loosen their hold, when she felt herself sustained by some irresistible force. It seemed to her that something held her round the waist and dragged her backward. The waves had now receded with the rapidity of water rushing into a mill-dam. Andrée drew a long breath and opened her eyes again. Madame Mornac, who had fainted, lay beside her, and the waves were once more about to burst above their heads.

Just at that moment, the young girl witnessed a strange apparition. A man, who seemed to have fallen from the skies, was clutching at the garments of the two drowning women, and drawing them towards the rocks. Then, with a single bound, and before the waves had time to reach them again, he leaped into the crevice in the cliff and dragged them after him. Andrée, scarcely revived, gazed at him in amazement, and Madame Mornac, as if still struggling against the grasp of death, tried to push him from her. He was quite a young man, tall and thin. His sunburnt face was partly hidden by a mass of yellow hair, which fell in long curls over his shoulders. His feet were bare, and a pair of wide trousers, such as sailors wear, were rolled up to his knees. A cloak of coarse material and a broad blue linen sash completed his primitive costume. Without a single word, he raised the young girl like a feather, and carried her, trembling with fright, into the depths of the crevice. It grew narrower within, and at ten paces from the entrance, ended in a sort of ladder cut in the rock. At the foot of this ladder, which seemed inaccessible to anything but a mountain goat, the stranger began to make preparations which filled Andrée with vague fear. He wound a long rope about his waist, took some iron hooks in his hand, and the young girl, little reassured by his hasty gestures, asked herself whether these were preparations for some description of torture. She needed all her courage to speak to him. "I thank you, sir," she said at last, in a trembling voice—"without you we should have perished."

The young man reddened, and for the first time Andrée noticed his delicate features, and the singular expression of his eyes, in which wildness, pride, and childlike simplicity were mingled, and which at once surprised and charmed one.

"I trust entirely to you, sir," resumed Andrée, "What must be done now?"

"We must go up there," said the stranger in a soft voice, and pointing to the summit of the cliff.

"Up there! That's impossible; it would be better to wait here till the tide goes out."

"Five hours must elapse before you could double the Black Rock by the beach. Night is coming on; the wind is shifting to the north; the cold and dampness would kill you."

This laconic reply was given in a curt, almost imperious tone, and the young girl was struck by the absence of all respectful formulas in the speech of a man who could not, so it seemed, be anything more than a sailor or a goatherd.

"But, indeed, sir," she resumed, "my friend and I cannot follow you up there, and, besides, we are not alone. There are two other persons with us who succeeded in escaping from the waves and taking refuge in—"

"In the 'Sea-gulls' Cave?' Yes, I saw them enter. But I shall not take them with me," replied the young man, firmly. "You were on the point of drowning, and they left you to perish," he added, in a lower tone.

"Oh, sir, can you abandon them? They are exposed to the blast, they are suffering."

"There is nothing for them to fear. The tide never rises to the 'Seagulls' Cave.' Dickson, the English smuggler, was there during the two last nights, and he left some straw there to sleep on, and some wood for making a fire. Besides, I won't, I won't take them with me!" As the stranger said this, his eyes sparkled angrily.

Andrée reflected. Her strange protector was, perhaps, in the right, for Mademoiselle Brossin, broken down with fatigue, and overcome with fright, was, probably, unable to undertake the perilous ascent now proposed. It seemed wiser to send a carriage for her by way of the beach whenever the sea receded, and, to do this, it would be necessary to reach Biville as soon as possible. M. Mornac would be waiting there. This charitable thought decided Andrée to make the ascent. "I consent to follow you, sir," she said in a resolute tone, "but on condition that you will take my friend first, she is older than I am, and suffers more than I do."

"Neither before nor after. Both at once."

"But you might kill yourself in trying to save us," said Andrée, reddening in her turn.

"Do not fear that. Call your friend. In ten minutes we shall be up there."

During this odd dialogue Madame Mornac had partly recovered her strength, and she now joined Andrée, who timidly communicated the stranger's proposal to her.

"Anything rather than remain here," said the good lady with an eagerness which surprised the young girl. "The young fellow looks strong, and, besides, he knows the road, as he came that way. He has already saved us once and will save us again. I will go."

"Let us start," said the young man; "night is coming on."

And without another word he unwound the rope which he had placed about his waist, and secured first Andrée and then Madame Mornac to his sash, leaving a space of two yards between each link of this living chain. This was the same method as that employed by the Chamounix guides for ascending Mont Blanc.

"Now, you have only to follow me, and observe where I set my feet," he said quietly.

The two women looked at one another and seemed to hesitate. It was not that Andrée lacked courage, certainly, but at the moment of trusting herself to the stranger whom Heaven had sent to save her, it seemed to her as if she were about to confide her destiny to him forever.

Madame Mornac decided the question. "Come, my friend," said she, in the familiar tone which she usually assumed, "show us the way, and if you get us out of our scrape my husband will give you money enough to buy a handsome fishing-smack. That will be better than running barefoot about the cliffs."

The young man looked at her in surprise, and instead of replying set his foot upon the first projection in the rock.

"Oh, my dear madame," said Andrée, "how fortunate for us that we met him here."

"You are right. When we are up at the top, we shall have time to thank him as he deserves."

The ascent began, and the two women saw that, although the road was

dangerous, it was practicable. The steps were not more difficult to climb than many Alpine passages which tourists of both sexes ascend every year. Besides, the young man went up with so much confidence, and followed with such patient attention every movement made by the young girl and the old lady, he encouraged them in so musical and so resolute a voice, that all fear soon left them. As they went up, the noise of the raging sea grew more distant. The squall subsided in the crevice in hollow moans, and the sea-birds, disturbed in their nests, brushed against Andrée's brow with their wings, causing her a strange thrill. It was like a dream. It seemed to her that she was rising to Heaven, and that some supernatural being was drawing her after him into unlimited space. When, at last, she set her foot upon the short, thick grass on the summit of the cliff, her eyes were bright, her complexion brilliant, and incoherent words escaped her lips. Madame Mornac's appearance recalled her to herself. "At last we are safe," exclaimed the lawyer's wife, "and I must really give that brave fellow a kiss, and my husband must—"

An expressive pressure of the hand from Andrée stopped the good woman at the moment when she was about to renew her offers of money. The young man was unfastening the rope without a word, and his eyes avoided meeting Andrée's.

"Well, then," boldly resumed Madame Mornac, "let us say no more about a reward, but our protector must come to-morrow to take dinner with us. You know the Beaudonière Farm, do you not, my friend?"

"Yes," said the young man, curtly.

"Well, then, to-morrow at noon we shall expect you. My husband, this young lady, and myself will drink your health with all our hearts, I'll answer for that; but be sure to come to-morrow, for we are going away in a couple of days. We have an invalid friend who is very dear to us in Paris and she cannot spare us long; but when we get there Monsieur Mornac, who used to be a lawyer, will find something for you to do."

"Pray believe, sir," hastily interrupted Andrée, seeing the young man frown, "that I shall pray for you every day of my life, and with that object I ask you to tell me your name, which I shall never forget."

The stranger cast down his eyes, and did not at first reply. "I am called Jean," said he, at last, in so low a tone that he was scarcely audible.

"Jean! but that is merely a Christian name, my friend!" exclaimed Madame Mornac.

"Tell me, I beg," said Andrée.

The young man raised his head. "My name is Jean de Monville," he said abruptly. And then he darted away across the country as fast as he could go.

"To-morrow! to-morrow! we shall expect you! Be there at twelve!" shouted the notary's wife as loudly as she could. But Jean de Monville had disappeared among the furze-bushes.

"He must be mad!" exclaimed Madame Mornac in amazement.

"He saved us," replied Andrée, who stood motionless and lost in thought.

"The poor fellow certainly deserves to be well rewarded," resumed the notary's wife, "but he is crazy, all the same. Did you hear, my dear, the name he told us? Jean de Monville! There are no more Monvilles—unless the baron who bought the ruined castle should take it into his head some day to call himself Monsieur Brossin de Monville. The name has long been extinct. You see that the young fellow must be crazy."

"I think I heard it said at the farm," said Andrée, timidly, "that there was a descendant of the family in the country about here, and that he was very poor."

"Bah! that was mere peasants' gossip. Besides, we shall soon know all about our deliverer, for I shall inquire this very evening, of Daugué, our farmer, who knows everybody in the district; and if this young fellow does not come to dinner, I will have him hunted up and brought to us. Meantime, we had better hurry on to La Beaudonnière, for by remaining here in our present state, we may catch inflammation of the lungs."

"When we get there," said Andrée, "we must send our carriage to bring back Mademoiselle Brossin, and also send word to her mother at the château."

"True! I had quite forgotten the young lady who runs about all alone with that bad fellow Jules; they are a pretty couple, I must say, and well matched. He may as well marry her as soon as possible; they were really made for one another."

The good lady thus gave utterance to her dislike as she walked briskly along in the direction of the village, and Andrée followed her without attempting to interrupt her, for she knew well enough that as regards Noridet it was idle to attempt to change her opinions. The night was falling, and there remained barely time to reach the farm before dark. It was the letting of this farm which had brought M. Mornac into the country. His journey to Normandy had been decided upon in a few hours' time, and Andrée had resigned herself to leaving Madame de Mathis for three whole days. As for the walk along the beach which had so nearly terminated in a fatal manner, it had been suddenly thought of at La Beaudonnière, while M. Mornac was signing his lease, and they had agreed to meet in the evening at Biville, where, by a singular coincidence, the party from the château had also made arrangements to picnic. It was towards Biville, therefore, that Madame Mornac now directed her steps, and she was not a little surprised when at the first turn in the road, she found herself in presence of M. and Madame Brossin, whom she cordially disliked.

The baroness had acted precisely as Henriette had prophesied to Noridet. The north-east wind and the shingle had soon disheartened her, and this excellent mother had turned back to the château without troubling herself about her daughter, who, for that matter, was in the habit of doing as she pleased. Count d'Alcamo had contented himself with smiling on seeing Madame Brossin return; for this course admirably suited his purposes, and the baron, who was anxious to marry Henriette to Noridet's three millions, saw no objection whatever to their lengthened tête-à-tête. Everybody had gone to Biville by carriage, including even Alfred Brossin, who had renounced his excursion to Dieppe in order to reply at length to a note from Mademoiselle Argentine.

The count had dispatched Pierre Bernard and the post-chaise to the road near the Black Rock, and, things having now taken a new turn, he did not doubt but what the elopement would be carried out. He was thus in a very good humour, and his gaiety had greatly increased when, on arriving at Biville, he saw that the young people had not yet appeared. The dinner had been spread inside a tent put up beneath the shade of some ancient beech-trees on the baron's domain, and for a couple of hours Henriette and Noridet had been awaited without any great impatience, but at last Madame Brossin thought that it would look well to appear anxious about her daughter—her "dear daughter"—and so she set out with her

husband to try to discover the tardy promenaders from the top of the cliffs. It was thus that they encountered Madame Mornac and André.

A cold bow was exchanged, and the baroness was about to pass on, when Madame Mornac, whose conscience prompted her to speak, resolutely exclaimed: "Good day, madame; I am sure that you are looking for your daughter, and you do not know that she was nearly drowned just now."

"Drowned!" exclaimed Madame Brossin, in alarm.

"Yes; no more, no less. We were all hemmed in by the tide, and if a kind of savage had not fallen from the clouds to rescue us, we should have been drowned two hours ago."

"But where is my daughter?" demanded the baron in great anxiety.

"Oh, Mademoiselle Henriette did not need the assistance of any savage, or our help, either. She was rescued by Monsieur Jules Noridet. At the present moment they are both in safety in a cave, and when the tide runs out they will come here by way of the Black Rock."

"In a cave!" exclaimed the baroness, with amazement and displeasure.

"My daughter in a cave with Monsieur Noridet?"

"Madame," said André, at once, "Mademoiselle Henriette was obliged to take shelter there to escape from certain death, and I should not have hesitated to do the same."

"But then," exclaimed Madame Brossin, with a remarkable display of words and gestures, "we must send someone to find her at once, and bring her back; we must put the horses to the carriage and send it on to the Black Rock."

"There is no need of that," said Count d'Alcamo, who had just joined the group and heard the few last words, "I thought it likely that the promenaders on the beach might be fatigued, and I gave my steward orders to have a chaise in readiness near the foreland. Besides, the tide will not admit of their leaving their hiding-place for two hours at the least."

"If my daughter is not in actual danger—" began the baron.

"The only risk she runs is that of marrying Monsieur Noridet," whispered Alcamo in his ear.

"The best way is to wait at Biville, then," resumed M. Brossin, "and to have warm clothes and supper ready for them, when they get here."

"Let us walk on, now," said Andrée to Madame Mornac.

It was dark by this time, and the young girl had not been able to distinguish the features of the count, although his voice awoke a confused recollection in her mind. "Will you allow me, ladies," said the stranger, "to accompany you to the village? Monsieur and Madame Brossin will excuse me if I go on with you."

"Don't take the trouble, sir," growled Madame Mornac; "my husband won't wait for the tide to run out to look for us, and we do not need any one's help."

"Not even that of your father's friend?" said the count, leaning towards Andrée.

The young girl started, and tried to distinguish the features of the person speaking to her. Madame Mornac had already gone on ahead, and the Brossins had retreated a few steps to exchange remarks concerning Henriette's plight.

"It is I, André," said the stranger, in a low tone, "I who told you one evening when you were weeping beside your godmother: 'If ever a danger threatens you, summon me, I will come.'"

Andrée, silent on account of her surprise and agitation, eagerly listened to this friendly voice, and forgot to follow Madame Mornac.

"To-day," continued Alcamo, "you were near death, and I was not near to protect you. I have sworn to your father that I would watch over you. Swear to me in your turn never to leave Paris without letting me know."

"I promise," said Andrée; "but you, sir, will you refuse me the pleasure of introducing you to Monsieur and Madame Mornac, the friends to whom I owe so much?"

"Not here; it is impossible," said the stranger, quickly; "but you will soon see me in Paris, and I shall perhaps bring you news—"

"From my father?" cried the young girl.

"Yes, from your father, Andrée. He is courageously proceeding with his task, and the day is not far distant when everything will be accomplished. On that day he will throw himself into his daughter's arms, and ask her pardon for having so long deserted her."

Alcamo's voice trembled as he spoke these words.

"Andrée, Andrée!" called out Madame Mornac from a distance, "my husband is waiting for us, and must be in dreadful anxiety. Come, my love, come!"

"Farewell, sir," said the young girl, holding out her hand to the count.

"Tell my father that I pray Heaven for him."

Andrée felt a tear fall upon the hand which the stranger kissed, and she went on her way deeply troubled. However, the count called her back. "What is the name of the person who rescued you?" he asked. "I wish to tell it to your father."

"Oh, yes!" said the young girl, "tell him that I was nearly drowned, and that I owe my life to Jean de Monville."

"Jean de Monville!" repeated the count, "that is strange! How old is this man?"

"I cannot tell," stammered Andrée, "twenty-two, or perhaps only twenty."

"What does he do? Where does he live?"

"I don't know anything about that, but I expect he will come to-morrow at noon to Monsieur Mornac's farm, and I shall then know."

The stranger seemed to reflect. "Andrée," said he, suddenly, "to-morrow at noon I will call to see you and let you introduce me to your old friends, Monsieur and Madame Mornac. I wish to see the young fellow who calls himself Jean de Monville."

XI.

ELEVEN o'clock had just struck. In a cosy room of the Château of Monville Noridet, seated before a large fire, was warming himself, and reading a blue paper which appeared to be a telegram. He had returned only an hour before from his perilous adventure, and had related his experiences with a sobriety of details which had somewhat surprised his hearers. He had limited himself to stating in a very few words, that caught by the tide, he had been fortunate enough to find a shelter with Mademoiselle Brossin in a cave. It had been impossible to avoid waiting till the sea receded, and Noridet apologised in the politest terms for the weariness which his companion in misfortune had been obliged to endure in this disagreeable retreat. The rest of the story was known to everybody. They had gone

to find the young people in Count d'Alcamo's postchaise, which had been found in the nick of time on the road near the Black Rock, and the truants had been met on the strand.

Noridet's narrative had been characterized by modesty and discreetness, which won him the approbation of the baron and Madame Brossin. Without praising himself in the least, he had dwelt on the presence of mind shown by Mademoiselle Henriette in the midst of the serious danger which had threatened her. He had then inquired with anxious solicitude after Madame Mornac and Andrée, and in expressing his regret at not having been able to protect them also, he had completed the conquest of all his hearers.

Henriette had been still less explicit than her protector, and had replied merely by monosyllables to all her parents' questions. Her silence had been naturally attributed to her fatigue, which was visible. The poor girl was in a deplorable condition. Her hair, drenched by the sea water, hung wildly about her shoulders; her cheeks, usually very white, were covered with blue spots, and a feverish fire glared from her eyes, which were surrounded by dark circles. The disorder of her toilet was such that she had been obliged to wrap herself up in a large travelling cloak. The trip from Biville to the château had been rapidly made, and Noridet had hurried to his room, saying that he was greatly fatigued. He was, indeed, about to retire to bed, when he saw a blue envelope, which had been placed on the mantelpiece during his absence. His heart beat fast as he opened it and read: "Dispatch received, twelve twenty. Vintage begins to-night. Weather favourable. Success certain. Will telegraph to-morrow morning."

Thus had Fortoto written, little dreaming that he was commissioned to do an evil deed. A sinister smile played upon Noridet's lips as he read the telegram, and he fixed his eyes, as he concluded, upon the clock. "It is dark at seven o'clock at this time of year," he muttered, sitting down in his arm-chair, and Fortoto must have hidden himself in the yard at about half-past seven. Two hours for all the stirring about on the staircase to cease, and one hour for action. Good! I believe that the baron's timepiece has just struck the hour of my deliverance!"

He rose up, and began to pace about the room nervously. "Ah!" said he, clenching his fists, "I have waited a long time for this night, which will give me back my liberty. At last, I shall cease to be the slave of that odious Lugos, who forces me to do as he pleases. I need endure this servitude no more!"

A bright fire glowed in the large fireplace, the Venetian mirrors reflected the lights, the hangings of silken texture fell in full folds beside the buhl furniture to the thick Smyrna carpet. Noridet gazed at all this luxury with sombre joy. It seemed as though, for the first time, he really enjoyed it. "At last!" said he, between his teeth, "I shall be rich without having occasion for fear; I shall be master of my own life and fortune, without being forced to obey the orders of that scoundrel. To-morrow morning, when I have received the telegram telling me that the vintage is in, I will leave the château, and while the fools who live here are looking for me I shall take the express from Dieppe to Paris. And then, Monsieur Lugos," he continued with increased violence, "when I have secured those papers, I will spit into your very face all the hatred and contempt I feel for you; for you will have nothing more to hold as a rod of terror over me, and you will be unable to threaten me with the will signed by my uncle."

Exhausted by this tirade, Noridet threw himself once more into his arm-chair, and again began reflecting: "He will have no more papers, but he will still be able to speak, and tell what he knows; and if he does speak, he will be believed. If I had merely that Bernard in my way, I should not fear. No one would listen to a servant's denunciation. But he, Lugos, possesses immense wealth, and his word would be taken."

Noridet then began to calculate with due coolness all the chances, good or evil, which Fortoto's nocturnal expedition was likely to afford him. It was in vain, however, that he examined the situation from every point of view; he could only arrive at one conclusion, that he must rid himself of M. Lugos.

This had been his first intention, and if he had renounced it for a time, it was because he wished to hide from himself the terrible necessity for a new murder. By a strange reaction, this man, who had not recoiled from a most odious crime, now hesitated at ridding himself of a hated enemy. His sudden horror of murder came much less from a rebellious conscience than from physical repugnance. Noridet had had the fearful courage to employ poison, but he had not witnessed the death-agonies of his victims. To strike the blow himself, to find himself stained with blood, or be obliged to hide the dead body, all this filled him with horror and disgust. Besides, how was he to kill Count d'Alcarno in this crowded château without exposing himself to be arrested like some common scoundrel? How was he to surprise a man who was so cunning, so strong, and so well guarded?

By dint of reflection, he at last began to believe that he might perhaps succeed in forcing the foreigner to fight a duel with him. There are insults which the coolest men, those who have the most command over themselves, cannot patiently endure. M. Lugos, if he struck him in the face, would seize hold of some weapon if there were any at hand, and fight on the instant. This was the situation he, Noridet, must contrive to bring about, and, being a skilful fencer, he thought himself sure of killing his adversary sword in hand.

He had reached this point in his reflections, when a slight noise made him turn his head. Some one had stealthily approached his door and slipped a letter under it. Noridet rose, approached the door, and, on taking up the note, recognised the writing of M. Lugos. The missive ran as follows:

"After your adventure on the beach, I must learn what are your present intentions as to the elopement, in order to take my measures accordingly. I must see you to-night, and it is important that no one in the château should know of our interview. I shall go out into the garden in an hour from now. I will cross the lawn and seat myself on the bench at the end of the avenue behind the pines. Come to meet me there, passing along the terrace, near the old moat. We can talk there without being seen. I shall wait for you, and rely upon your exactitude, for this letter is *an order*—do not forget that."

Noridet remained thoughtful and gloomy as he finished reading. "An order!" he muttered, grinding his teeth. "Very well, I will obey it!" As he said this, he raised his head, and then added:

"But it shall be the last!"

As Noridet had resolved to propose a duel without witnesses, he could not find a more favourable opportunity than that which now offered itself. He resolved to profit by the occasion, and, as a first step, to reach the appointed spot in advance of his adversary, so as to examine the ground on which the duel would take place if he succeeded in bringing it about. He

hastily dressed himself, and slipped on a long overcoat, which would enable him to conceal such weapons as he might take with him. He remembered that the passage outside his chamber led to a large fencing-hall, the walls of which were covered with foils, swords, and other weapons. The handsome Vergoncey frequently practised there with young Alfred, and Noridet had only the day before condescended to exchange a few thrusts with these inexperienced swordsmen. He met no one on his way to the fencing room, where he found several trophies of rifles, revolvers, and pistols, mingled with side-arms, of all of which the baron thought a great deal; not that he was fond of shooting or of fencing, but he wished to conform to everything which constituted fashionable life at a château. Noridet chose a pair of duelling swords, tried them to see if they suited his hand, and slipped them under his overcoat. He thought it idle to take pistols with him. A night-duel could not be fought with firearms without the reports bringing witnesses to the spot. However, as Noridet was a man of precaution, he took down a six-shot revolver, ascertained that it was loaded, and slipped it into his pocket.

Thus prepared for any event, he blew out the candle he had brought with him, and repaired to the garden by a staircase which led to the terrace where, on the evening of his arrival, he had been introduced to Count d'Alcamo. The door opened inwardly, and he took good care not to close it again, so as to be able to re-enter the house. Agreeably to the directions of M. Lugos, he followed a terrace which overlooked the moat of the old château of Monville. This mode of progression had the advantage of sheltering him from view, as huge lime trees rose up on either side, and formed a veritable dome of foliage above. Noridet hurried along past the château, and reached the avenue, which he entered. The tempest had subsided. The trees were still quivering, but the sky was beginning to clear, and the moon, which was at its zenith, shone at intervals from between the clouds. From time to time Noridet glanced behind him. Whatever might occur, he wished to avoid observation, and he examined the spot with the keen eye of a redskin on the war-path. However, he saw nothing suspicious, and reached the end of the terrace without impediment. Before him spread a grassy slope, which reached to the edge of the cliff. A cluster of pines hid the spot where stood the bench mentioned by the count. Beyond this green carpet the sea, now calmer, shone in the moonlight. The lime trees did not extend farther than the moat which edged the terrace, and yet a huge shadow covered the lawn which Noridet had to cross. This side of the garden was not very familiar to him, and he raised his head to look for the cause of this phenomenon. On his left, the old castle of Monville raised its ivy decked walls, towering above the place of assignation. Rent from top to bottom by the explosion of a powder mine, the high keep of the companions of William the Conqueror still reared its proud outlines on the Norman coast. It seemed like a sentry sent ahead to protect the cliff. But Noridet's mind was little disposed to admire the poetic effect of this noble ruin, lit up by the mild radiance of the fine autumnal night, and he was proceeding onward when he thought that he heard something stir above his head. He drew back, looked attentively about him, and saw nothing. He thought that he must have heard some owl about to fly from its nest, and he continued to advance. The noise had ceased immediately, and was not of an alarming nature, so without any further anxiety, he now went rapidly down the slope, turned past the pines, and found himself, to his great surprise, in presence of Count d'Alcamo.

His adversary had anticipated him at the meeting place. Seated upon the bench, he was quietly smoking a cigar and contemplating the sea. He turned as he heard Noridet, but did not rise, and contented himself with pointing to a seat beside him. "You are punctual," said he, quietly. "I hope that you did not meet any one on your way here."

"No one," replied Noridet, seating himself, "no one whatever."

"That is all right then. We shall be able to talk at our ease, and I fancy that you must have a deal to tell me."

"I do not know. Question me, and I will see whether I can answer you."

M. Lugos was, no doubt, surprised by the tone in which this reply was uttered, for he quickly turned and looked his adversary in the face. "You forget, sir, that it is for me alone to judge of that, and at this moment I wish—do you understand?—I wish to know exactly what took place between you and Mademoiselle Brossin."

"And I refuse to tell you!" exclaimed Noridet, rising abruptly.

"Indeed! This, then, is open rebellion?"

"You have said it."

"What is the reason of this change of conduct, if you please?"

"The reason is that I am tired of being your slave, and that I mean to kill you."

"To kill me! Here! Now!" said M. Lugos, in a mocking tone. "But why not, after all; another assassination would fitly complete the series of crimes which you already have on your conscience."

"I do not mean to murder you, I wish to fight with you, and I have brought weapons with me," replied Noridet, laying the swords beside him.

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir," resumed M. Lugos, with a visible effort to restrain a smile, "you must have entirely forgotten a certain conversation which we had one evening at a village inn."

"I have forgotten nothing, and I know that you have an accomplice ready to denounce me; but I know who he is, and when I have killed you I shall kill him."

The stranger suddenly became more serious. "Ah, you are aware who my accomplice is," said he, after a moment's silence; "but do you know, Monsieur Noridet, that you must be very keen to have found all this out so soon. Unfortunately, it does not change our respective positions, and I advise you in your own interest to defer the massacre you meditate."

"You refuse to fight then?" said Noridet, in a voice quivering with rage.

"Most positively! I have no wish to die by your hand, and I need you too much for my plans to wish to kill you."

"I begin to think that you are a coward," said Noridet, who had not renounced his intention of urging his adversary to the last extremity.

"Let us reason for a moment, my dear sir," resumed the count, shrugging his shoulders. "You wish to exterminate me because I am trying to marry you to a wealthy young lady; it is simply insane, and, in your place, many people would thank me."

Noridet had grown calmer and seemed to be reflecting. "Why are you so anxious to marry me to Mademoiselle Brossin?" he asked more calmly.

"I must remark, that by questioning me you take my place; however, I consent to answer you. I wish that Mademoiselle Brossin should become your wife because you please her, because you have a fortune of three millions, and because I am particularly interested in her," said M. Lugos, emphasising his last words.

"She must be his daughter," thought Noridet, whose eyes glittered with delight ; and he added aloud : "I might have consented to marry her this morning, but to-night it is too late."

"Why?" asked M. Lugos, softly.

"Because I will never marry a woman I have seduced."

"Is that true?"

"Yes!" replied Noridet; "now, do you still intend to abstain from fighting with me?"

"I do," replied the count, with the utmost calmness. And, without waiting for a fresh explosion of anger, he rose and began to walk slowly between the bench and the cliff. Noridet looked at him with stupefaction, and began to lose his self-control at sight of this coolness, which upset all his plans. The blood rushed to his head, his eyes grew dim, and the sword he had now taken hold of trembled in his grasp.

M. Lugos, lost in profound thought, had stopped short three paces from him, and had turned his back. Noridet laid his sword upon the bench and looked at his enemy with his eyes flashing.

At that moment the clock of the château struck one. "Fortoto must have the papers by this time. The vintage is in," muttered Noridet, taking a step forward. The foreigner had not stirred.

"Die!" cried Jules, bounding forward, and he gave M. Lugos a violent push—making him lose his balance and fall over the cliff.

Noridet remained leaning forward, his arms extended, his eyes wild, and his hair on end. He was listening. The cliff was not very high at this point, but, although the wind had lessened, the billows from the open sea were still dashing with force against the rocks. The noise of the count's fall had, without doubt, been lost amid the breaking of the waves upon the strand, for Noridet heard nothing. M. Lugos had not raised a single cry. He must have been killed at once. The murderer, for a moment, thought of leaning over the cliff to make sure that his enemy was really dead. The moon, which was no longer veiled by the clouds, would have enabled him to see a body extended at the foot of the cliff; but Noridet shrunk from the sight. His imagination too clearly pictured the bleeding disfigured corpse. He let himself sink upon the bench where a moment before he had been trying to exasperate M. Lugos, and he remained there as though unconscious, overcome by that physical exhaustion which follows upon acts of violence; however, his thoughts rushed through his whirling brain, and he calculated with singular clearness the probable consequences of the catastrophe. "To-morrow morning," thought he, "I shall receive Fortoto's telegram, and before any one has discovered that the count has disappeared, I shall be far away from Monville."

A moment later the thought that this sudden departure might give rise to suspicion crossed his mind, and he asked himself whether he should not do better to wait a day longer at the château in order to find out what would be the result of the murder. "No," he said to himself, after having reflected for an instant; "the most urgent thing is to get possession of the papers and destroy them. I will leave a word for the baron to tell him of my departure. I will see Fortoto in Paris to-morrow evening. I shall be back at the château on the day after to-morrow, and if Monsieur Bernard gives me any trouble I will remove him, also, from my path."

Having formed his resolution, Noridet gathered up the swords, placed them under his overcoat, and made ready to depart: however, before retiring, he resolved to cast a last look about him, to make sure that he had

left no traces likely to betray him. The autumn had been a delightful one, and the ground bore no mark of footsteps, as it was not damp.

"I am mad to think of such fears," said Noridet, as he took the road back to the terrace. "No one can accuse me as no one has seen me here."

At this instant a prolonged cry reached his ear and rooted him to the spot, mute with surprise and terror. It sounded like a call from Heaven, and yet this appeal could only have come from a human voice. Noridet, although he had many times risked his life for the sake of a petty quarrel, and had but just been anxious to engage in a duel to the very death and on the verge of a precipice, although he had never recoiled from danger or from crime, now felt afraid. The cry arose once more, clearly and distinctly. This time doubt was impossible. The cry sounded from the summit of the old tower, and seemed to be directed towards the sea. Danger was assuming a palpable form. Some one was hidden there in the old castle, some one who must have witnessed the scene on the cliff. The superstitious fear which had for a moment made Noridet shudder, vanished when he found himself in the presence of a threatening reality. "I have arms," said he, between his teeth, "and if I am forced to kill once more, well, then, I will kill!" And he walked towards the tower.

Silence again prevailed, and Noridet heard naught but his own footsteps repeated by the echoes of the ruins. At last, however, he thought he again heard a stirring among the branches, and it even seemed to him that a human form was gliding along a narrow cornice, half way up the walls of the keep. It was an impression rather than a certainty on his part, for a moment later there was no further stirring, nor anything to be seen. However, this mattered little. A witness of the crime was there in the tower, that much was certain, and Noridet was determined that he should not leave it alive. He at once set about planning how to find the stranger. He had now reached the entrance of the terrace, and in another step he would be under the embowering lime trees. This circumstance suggested a plan of action to him.

He thought that the cry from the top of the tower was intended for some persons trying to approach the coast. In all probability these were smugglers, and the man in the castle must be some sentinel placed there to give them a signal. It seemed certain that he would come out to join his associates, especially if he thought himself unobserved. Noridet's best course therefore, was to pretend to go away and then return and hide himself near the door of the keep, so as to fall upon the mysterious witness as soon as he appeared upon the threshold.

While planning this ambushade, Noridet thought of a means of averting suspicion from himself in case an inquiry were started as to the cause of the count's death. If Alcamo's body were found upon the beach, and the corpse of the smuggler discovered at the foot of the tower, the two deaths would certainly be connected together by the legal officials. The conclusion would be arrived at that the count, having left the château to smoke his cigar on the cliffs, had fallen in with a band of smugglers, and that after a sharp contest he had fallen a victim to his misplaced courage. Without losing an instant, Noridet hurried on under the lime trees, remained for ten minutes or so under their protecting shelter, and then returning cautiously, he glided along the wall to the entrance of the tower. There the old defences of the postern offered him every facility for hiding himself. A loop-holed advanced work protected the spot where the drawbridge had been placed. This was an excellent post for seeing without being seen,

and Noridet concealed himself behind the narrow cleft of a barbican which faced the open entrance of the keep. So as not to be hindered in his movements, he laid one of the swords upon the ground, and took the other in his right hand. As for the revolver, he kept that in his pocket so as not to be tempted to use it, as he feared that the report would raise an alarm, and therefore wished to avoid using firearms except at the last extremity.

Thus prepared for the attack, Noridet waited, pale, calm, and resolute. He spent a quarter of an hour in mortal uncertainty. Then an almost imperceptible sound reached his ear, and a man appeared under the low arch of the postern. The shadow of the ruins prevented Jules from distinguishing his features and attire, but his tall form was clearly defined against the dark background of the wall. The moment had come.

Not to lose the advantage of taking him unawares, Noridet bounded forth from his hiding-place, and threw himself, sword in hand, upon the stranger, who had made a step forward. He hoped to surprise him, and kill him by a single thrust in the breast. But the stranger in the ruins was undoubtedly on his guard, for retreating with marvellous rapidity, he avoided the weapon directed at his heart, and the same movement gained him the protecting shadow of the door. Noridet stopped short in amazement. His adversary had disappeared.

M. de Mathis's nephew did not believe in spirits, and, in spite of the stranger's singular flitting, he had a tangible shape, so that by following him he must be reached. Noridet was acquainted with the interior of the keep; for on the day of his arrival the baron had made all haste to display the ruins, of which he was quite as proud as if he had inherited them from his ancestors. Now Noridet remembered that a narrow spiral staircase led to the upper platform. There was no outlet save some narrow ogival windows in the wall. The worst that offered would be to climb up and run the stranger through against the parapet. As for the struggle which might take place, Noridet had no fear of its result. He was sure of killing his man upon the platform without noise or danger. He resolved even to throw his body over the wall to let people imagine that the struggle had taken place below. He therefore set out in pursuit of the fugitive, and began to ascend the steps. As an additional precaution, he now held his revolver ready in his left hand. He decided that if his adversary returned and showed fight, he might venture to fire without a dangerous result, as the massive walls would deaden all sound.

The steps of the stranger were no longer to be heard on the flagstones; it seemed as though he must be shoeless. In spite of the trouble which the rapid ascent gave him, Noridet was gaining ground. At the height of sixty steps or so, he thought that he saw the vague outline of the stranger figure and he now for a moment thought of firing. However, he said to himself that this was useless imprudence, and redoubled his efforts to overtake the stranger. "Stop!" he cried, "stop, or you are a dead man!"

But no heed was paid to this injunction, and the light sound of the stranger's footsteps again ceased. Noridet bounded up three or four steps at a time, and saw on his right hand a window half hidden by thick ivy. The branches still shook as though they had been stirred by some one who had passed out. It was evident, indeed, that the stranger had fled by this dangerous route.

Noridet let a cry of rage escape his lips and rushed towards the window but, at the moment when he was about to look out, he reflected that

his enemy's sudden disappearance might hide some artifice. To attempt flight by a loophole placed forty feet above the ground, a man must have unusual skill and vigour. Moreover, the stranger must have found a footing upon some projection in the wall, and could thus strike at him if he put out his head. Noridet remembered the rustling sound which he had heard among the ivy outside the keep, and he suspected that, on this side, there must be a means of ascent and descent for the exclusive use of the strange inhabitant of the ruins.

The case had grown perplexing. To pursue the fugitive among the ivy was impossible; it would be wiser to meet artifice with artifice and return to the foot of the keep. This time he might perhaps surprise the ever-fitting personage at the moment when he set foot upon the ground. Noridet decided that if the stranger persisted in remaining perched among the ivy, he would kill him with his revolver rather than again let him escape. This ridiculous race after an adversary who seemed to be mocking him had fully exasperated Jules, who was now on the point of forgetting all prudence. Time pressed, however, for night was becoming day, and it was necessary to be inside the château before it was light.

Amid all these terrible nocturnal adventures, M. Lugos's murderer had lost all notion of time, and it seemed to him that morning would find him still hurrying after the stranger. He wished to end the pursuit at any risk. He rushed down the steps without further reflection, hoping by doing so to be in advance of his adversary, who, with all his agility, could not so rapidly descend by way of the parasitic foliage. "I will shoot him 'on the wing,'" said Noridet, with an evil laugh.

He now darted furiously out by the postern, and determined to fire at the fugitive as he held on to the ivy. But vainly did he look and listen—nothing was to be seen, nothing to be heard. All was calm and still. The stranger had once more vanished like an apparition. Had he already reached the ground, and fled toward the cliffs, or had he again taken refuge in the interior of the keep? Noridet knew not, and though trembling with rage, he was obliged to confess himself defeated. This dangerous game might go on indefinitely, and the murderer no longer had the courage to keep it up. The remembrance of his crime urged him to leave the spot. He thought of flying, first to the château, then to Paris, to foreign parts if necessary, and on and on till he was beyond the reach of this mysterious witness.

One lucid thought predominated amid his resolves—to hide his absence from the château during the night. If he succeeded in reaching his room again without being seen and in replacing the weapons in the fencing-hall, no one in the château would know that he had left his bed. He now ran to the spot where he had left one of the swords, but he looked for it in vain. The weapon was no longer there. The stranger of the ruins alone could have taken it away, and it was now evident that he had succeeded in escaping while his pursuer was coming down the stairs. His almost supernatural disappearance completed Noridet's bewilderment, and he darted under the lime-trees without looking behind him. The terrace was deserted. The garden-door of the house opened noiselessly, and the guilty man reached the passage near the fencing-hall. He hung up the sword which was left him and the revolver in the places from which he had taken them, glided swiftly along the passage, and finally shut himself up in his room, everything being dexterously and successfully accomplished.

A quarter of an hour after leaving the keep, Noridet was again seated in

an arm-chair before the fire, where the logs were smouldering. He might have deceived himself into thinking that he had passed a quiet night beside the fire, if his feverish eyes had not constantly beheld the terrible scene upon the cliffs.

"To-morrow!" he thought, "to-morrow, the corpse will be found. I shall be questioned, and I shall have to reply; and if that man who saw everything should appear, he possesses a proof—he has the sword!"

He shuddered, but presently he recollected that on the morrow he would have some news from Paris. "To-morrow I shall no longer fear accusations. Thanks to Fortoto, I shall be above attack."

The clock struck half-past three. Noridet had no desire to sleep, but he wished that the servants should be able to assert, if necessary, that he had spent the night in his bed, and he threw himself upon it. He did not even attempt to close his eyes, but he began calculating, and finally decided that the dispatch from Aurora's son would arrive at eight o'clock. He would then have time to reach Dieppe before the express started, and, by saying that an urgent affair required his attention—a pretext which would seem probable on account of the telegram—his absence would create no surprise. It was not likely that Count d'Alcamo's death would be discovered so early in the morning, as everyone rose late at the château. These reflections, and many others of the same kind, filled Noridet's mind till break of day.

As soon as he heard that the servants were astir, he rose, dressed himself in a travelling suit, wrote a short note to the baron to tell him of his departure, and repaired to the stables. Noridet, who was a great connoisseur of horse flesh, had been in the habit of going every morning to see the animals groomed, so the ostlers were not surprised at his making his appearance. He thought it necessary to be rather more talkative than usual with them, and he did not neglect to give them a louis to drink his health with, which they no doubt did at the first opportunity. Bernard, the count's steward, showed himself several times in the yard, and Noridet, who stealthily observed him, saw that he had no suspicion that his master was dead.

The murderer had just given orders to the head groom to have a vehicle ready to take him to Dieppe, when the jingle of bells announced the arrival of a messenger. Noridet's heart beat fast. He had a presentiment that this diligence was the one that would bring him news. He was not mistaken. A telegraph messenger alighted, and came forward with a blue paper in his hand. Noridet succeeded in controlling his impatience and keeping a composed countenance. He gave his name, signed the receipt, and unsealed the envelope with perfect calmness. But his air of indifference was replaced by mortal pallor when he had read the following phrase of terrific conciseness:

"Vintage failed yesterday—vintage for ever impossible for

"FORTOTO."

Everything had given way at once. The scaffolding of crime so skilfully raised had suddenly fallen. Noridet saw inevitable punishment looming ahead, and in his whirling brain arose the thought: "I have killed Monsieur Lugos, but his steward is alive, and Fortoto has failed to obtain the papers telling the story of my crime."

He had, however, enough self-control to hide his emotion, and paid the messenger liberally. "Get the horses ready at once if you please," he said to the head groom; "the telegram which I have just received obliges me to leave for Paris immediately."

In his anxiety he did not fail to remember that his most prudent course would be to leave Monville at once, without losing an instant. The body might be found at any moment on the strand ; it would then inevitably be brought to the château, and he lacked the courage, he felt, to witness the scene which would ensue. He was, besides, dying of anxiety to know what had taken place in the Rue Vanneau. There was an enigmatic sentence in the telegram from Fortoto : " The vintage is for ever impossible ! "

This ambiguous statement might perhaps hide treachery. Noridet began to fear that it did ; he wished, at all events, to know what had occurred ; for, of all the dangers that threatened him, the desertion of his accomplice would be the worst. If Fortoto joined the enemy's ranks, if he revealed his attempt to seize the will and the other papers, all would be lost, and the guilty man must fly from France as quickly as possible. This he already contemplated doing. That same day he might learn the story of the somnambulist's son, punish him if need be, and on the morrow set sail for England with his gold and his bonds.

Twenty minutes after the arrival of the unlucky telegram, Noridet was on his way to Dieppe, going as swiftly as an English trotter could take him. He reached the railway station in less than an hour. When there, however, he met with a disappointment. The winter service had begun on the day before, and all the hours of the trains were changed. There would be no train till half-past twelve, and Noridet was condemned to lose precious time at Dieppe. He thought of asking for a special train, but reflected that his extraordinary haste might be remarked, and that it was to his interest to avoid attracting attention. He therefore resigned himself to walking impatiently about the town, and the instinct which appears to act upon all murderers led him to go in the direction where he might, perhaps, hear his crime spoken of. After booking his baggage and sending back the carriage, he directed his steps towards the Faubourg du Pollet, and reached the pier. He knew that all the fishermen who cast their nets near Puys and Monville came to Dieppe by this route, and he said to himself that if M. Lugos had been found dead at the foot of the cliff, the news would be in every mouth. The time was well chosen, for the sea, coming up, drove all the fisher folk to shore, and Noridet met them returning with their baskets in their hands, and their nets over their shoulders. The women were chatting gaily together. Noridet stopped as they passed, and endeavoured to catch what they were saying as they went by ; but he heard nothing but complaints as to the scarcity of the fish, and some rough jests in Norman dialect. Some of the people offered prawns for sale, and one fishwife assured him that she had come from the Monville rocks, where the finest were caught. However, of the event in which he was so much interested not a word was said.

This silence astonished and reassured Noridet. If these women, naturally talkative, did not speak of a corpse found on the beach, it seemed probable that the body had been swept away, and carried out to sea. The count's disappearance would then remain unexplained for some days, at least. This chance gave the guilty man a respite, which he fully hoped to be able to turn to account. He now went back to the station, arrived there before the time for starting, and took his seat in a first-class carriage some minutes before the train steamed away. He soon fell soundly asleep, being exhausted by the moral and physical strain of the night before.

When he awoke at the Rouen station, he found that there was some one seated opposite to him. He had been alone on his departure from Dieppe,

and at first did not pay any attention to the passenger who had since entered the compartment. But finally, while rubbing his eyes, he saw that this passenger was bowing to him, and then looking up, he recognised, to his intense fright and amazement—M. Bernard, the Count d'Alcamo's steward.

It was indeed Bernard, humble, obsequious, and smiling. His appearance in this compartment and in this manner had something almost miraculous about it, and the murderer now fancied that all was discovered, and that the steward had followed him by rail to have him arrested. His first impulse was to dart out of the carriage, and try to escape amid the crowd on the platform; but, at the very moment when he was about to rise, M. Bernard spoke to him. "Excuse me, sir," he said, in a mild voice, "if I have taken the liberty of entering your compartment. I took a second-class ticket at Dieppe, but I was told that the parliamentary train would not reach Paris till seven. So at Malaunay I paid extra to go on by the express, and the guard let me in here; but if I had known that you were inside, I—"

The steward might have gone on in this way forever; Noridet was not listening to him. He was thinking of making his escape, and his hand was fumbling for the door handle.

"Don't disturb yourself, sir," said M. Bernard. "I will get out and find some other compartment," and with these words he also rose.

At that moment a fresh idea flashed through Noridet's brain. "Why do you want to move my friend?" said he, "you will oblige me by remaining. I don't care to travel alone, and you can keep me company."

"You are very kind, sir," said the steward, respectfully.

"No; I like to talk, that's all. You are in the Count d'Alcamo's employ, are you not?"

"Yes, sir, and have been for more than ten years past."

"Let us talk about him, then. I like your master very much," said Noridet, with unheard-of audacity, "and I know that he treats you more as a friend than as a person in his employ."

Noridet, as he spoke, looked at M. Bernard. But the steward's honest, placid countenance only expressed pleasure at the condescension of a superior. "He certainly does not know that his master is dead," thought Noridet.

At Rouen the stay was a short one, the train resuming its course in a few minutes. No one came into the compartment where Noridet and his companion found themselves. This tête-à-tête suited Jules admirably, for he still mistrusted Bernard, and wished to question him further. When they had passed through the tunnels beyond Rouen, and were emerging into the charming valley of the Seine, he said, with an easy air: "I thought that the count intended staying some days longer at Monville?"

"The count has changed his mind," replied the steward, quietly. "He gave me orders yesterday to get his rooms ready, and I think that he will be in Paris to-morrow."

"Then he must have made up his mind very hastily, for when he returned from Biville yesterday he proposed to me that we should take a ride to-day in the forest."

"The count sent for me late last night."

Noridet could not control a start. "You have not seen him to-day, then?" he asked.

"Oh, no, sir; I left the ehâteau at nine o'elock, and the count was not yet up."

Noridet now fell into profound meditation. The steward's replies coincided with those of the prawn-fishers. If Alcamo's body had not been found at low tide the steward might, indeed, have left Monville without knowing that his master was dead. "There is nothing to fear to-day," thought the murderer, "but Lugos won't turn up to-morrow. This man will wait one day, perhaps, even two, for his arrival. Then he will return to Monville; he will learn that the count has disappeared, and he will denounce me, since he has the papers."

The conversation had languished suddenly, and the train was now darting swiftly along, passing through the minor stations like a shot. Noridet from time to time cast a glance full of hatred at the unconscious M. Bernard, who maintained his respectful attitude, and kept his eyes lowered. "Do you know," asked Noridet, abruptly, "at how many more stations we shall stop between here and Paris?"

"Only at one, sir."

"Which is that?"

"Mantes."

Noridet knew the route, and remembered that before stopping at this last station the train would have to go through the long tunnel of Rolle-boise. This meant at least five minutes' complete darkness. "We are alone," thought the seoundrel, "and I am the stronger of the two."

He nestled into his corner and pretended to dose, but his eyes, kept partly open, watched the route attentively. An hour passed by like this. The railway stretched along at the foot of the heights which overlook the Seine, passing through a series of cuttings in the rock.

Noridet at last turned and saw that M. Bernard was sleeping. He thereupon softly rose, leaned out and unfastened the outside latch which secured the door at the bottom. He then again looked at his companion. The steward had not stirred, and his regular breathing showed that he was still fast asleep. The engine whistle had already announced the proximity of the tunnel. Noridet put his head out of the window, and a hundred yards ahead he saw the yawning mouth of the vaulted passage. He then resumed his seat, and did not take his eyes off M. Bernard, who still slept soundly. The light was waning, and a dull echo resounded along the high walls of the tunnel as the train entered it. "It is time," muttered Noridet.

He noiselessly rose, and opened the door of the compartment. The sleeper had heard nothing. He was half reclining in his corner with his legs stretched out and his head thrown back, and the noise of the train rushing under the resounding vault had not made him stir. "You will wake no more, you villain," said Noridet, as he sprang at his throat.

The struggle was a short one. The unfortunate steward, suffocated by his assailant's powerful grip, mechanically stretched out his hands to defend himself, but Noridet set his knee upon his chest, and weighed upon him with all his might. Bernard struggled convulsively; he attempted to cry out, and he even succeeded in partially repulsing Noridet. But soon his breath failed him; his hands fell to his side, his legs stiffened. He lost consciousness, and lay motionless upon the cushions of the compartment. The murderer then seized hold of him by the waist and was about to throw him out of the door, when a strange incident ensued. The man whom he had just strangled in a few seconds was now so heavy that he found it impossible to lift him. When he tried to raise the prostrate body it fell

back. He violently drew it upward, and it resisted as though death had given it back its strength. It was a battle with a dead man, a struggle with a corpse. There came a moment, when Noridet, mad with fear and anger, sunk back exhausted upon the seat. He looked wildly at his victim, and felt rooted to his seat by superstitious terror. It seemed to him that, if he again dared to lay his hand upon the man he had just slain, the latter would rise up and call him an assassin.

The train was rushing along with frightful rapidity, and the few apertures which let air into the vault flashed by like meteors. Soon a faint gleam began to light up the dark walls. "We are coming out," thought Noridet; "we are leaving the tunnel! I am lost!"

The imminence of his danger roused him, and lent him sufficient courage to finish his work. He seized the body by the feet, dragged it with great difficulty to the door, and flung it out upon the line. Half a minute later the train emerged from the tunnel into full daylight. Noridet closed the door again just in time.

This final effort had overwhelmed him. He remained in the attitude of a man crushed by fatigue, and had not even the strength to think. If he had been seen in this state, his crime would have been guessed; but he was alone, and the train was rushing on. Every instant, every turn of the wheels, carried him further and further from danger of betrayal. There was no trace of a struggle in the compartment. No blood, no torn cushions, or fragments of clothing. The murderer was without a scratch, and his clothes were scarcely creased. All that was to be seen in the compartment in which a cowardly crime had just been committed, was a stylish-looking young man of fashion travelling "first-class" to Paris. No one would have hesitated about taking a seat beside this well-dressed gentleman.

At Mantes, however, he had to endure ten minutes' agony. The sight of a gendarme walking up and down the platform made him turn pale and tremble. The telegraph had had ample time to report what had happened, and a search might perhaps be made in the train thought Noridet. However, there was nothing to justify this fear, and the train started on again at full speed, for Paris. Jules now considered himself safe.

"In another hour," thought he, "I shall be lost in the crowd on the boulevard, and no one will know that I travelled by express from Dieppe."

He reasoned correctly, for it was almost impossible to connect so obscure a person as M. Bernard with the fortunate possessor of several millions. M. Lugos alone could have explained the crime which had just been committed, and he was dead. Noridet's remorse fled at the same instant as his fears and horrible delight gradually filled his heart. For the first time for many days he felt himself free. Those who had weighed upon his life were no more to be feared, and he could venture to say: "The future is mine."

A single fear still disturbed his dearly bought tranquillity. Fortoto knew but half of a secret, but this secret he had perhaps revealed. His conduct was inexplicable, and Noridet determined to tackle the one remaining danger that threatened him without delay. The crime in the train had not changed his plans. M. Bernard would not re-appear at the Rue Vaucaeu, but the accusing documents still lay under his anvil, as Fortoto had relinquished the task of removing them. Noridet was, therefore, all the more resolved to question the mulatto. He calculated that a couple of hours would suffice to find him, make him speak, and get at the truth. The night was left for the task which had so far failed. "If need be, I will go alone to the Rue Vaucaeu," thought Noridet, at the moment when

the train reached the Paris terminus. And he added, with a nervous laugh: "One is never so well served as by one's self."

When Noridet alighted he felt like a ship-wrecked man, ashore once more. Hailing a cab, he bade the Jehu drive him at once to the Boulevard Bourdon.

Fortoto, despite his good fortune, had lately retained his modest rooms at the restaurant renowned for its fried fish. By reason of his former avocation as a police agent, his instinct told him that in order to hide himself from prying eyes he would do as well to keep to his former habits; and though he might have expended a portion of the five hundred francs given him by Noridet in procuring better lodgings, he had retained his little room under the roof. However, he had renounced his mountebank's attire, and procured a neat new suit, whilst still patronizing M. Pitois' establishment. It was there that Noridet had telegraphed to him and he felt sure of finding him there. He stopped his cab at the corner of the boulevard, and proceeded to the restaurant on foot. The little garden was deserted, and the house did not appear to have many customers. Noridet had some trouble in getting a waiter, who was fishing on the quay, to reply to his inquiries respecting M. Fortoto. The fellow looked at him in amazement, evidently unable to understand how it was that so well-dressed a gentleman should wish to see the ex-dealer in "Bengal powder."

"Is it Fortoto, the actor, sir, that you want to see?" he asked.

"Exactly. I wish to see him as soon as possible."

"Oh, you are a manager, perhaps, and want to offer him an engagement? It is a great pity."

"What is a pity?"

"Why, Fortoto would have been only too glad to take an offer, for he has nothing to do just now. But this is downright bad luck! for he don't live here now!"

"How long has he been gone?"

"Only since this morning. He did not come home last night, and when he put in an appearance this morning, he looked awfully queer. He made up a bundle of clothes, paid the landlord, and off he went."

"Didn't he leave any address?"

"No, sir. He only said that he was off, meaning to leave Paris."

"Then you can't tell me where I might find him?" said Noridet, who turned pale as he listened to these bad tidings.

"I'm sure I can't, and I don't think he'll come here again. Perhaps he'll never show himself any more. It's not for the sake of talk, sir, but I'll tell you one thing, he looked as though he'd been up to some bad business or other. Will you have any beer, sir, or absinthe, or vermouth?" added the waiter, who had by this time reached the garden with Noridet.

"No, nothing," replied the latter, curtly, throwing the attendant a franc.

He strode out of the garden, reached his cab, and was driven to his residence in the Rue du Helder. He longed to be alone, to reflect over the new incident which upset all his plans.

"Here is a letter, just brought for you, sir," said the doorkeeper, with a deal of bowing and scraping, as Noridet entered the house.

Noridet opened the missive, and, to his great surprise, a number of bank-notes fell out. He thought at first that his lawyer had sent him some money, but the next moment he saw Fortoto's signature below the letter, which ran as follows: "Monsieur Jules—Forgive me, for I am very unhappy. I should have been glad to do all that I promised, but reasons,

which I cannot tell you, prevent me from serving you. However, if I leave you thus, and perhaps for ever, I am neither a traitor nor an ingrate, for I shall not tell anyone anything, and I shall never forget your kindness. I send you back four hundred francs out of the five hundred which you gave me. I have spent one hundred, which I hope to be able to return to you very soon; and begging you once more not to feel any ill-will against me, I remain your very humble and obedient servant, FORTOTO."

"The poor fellow has gone crazy," muttered Noridet as he read this enigmatical note.

XII.

DURING the terrible night on which Noridet had rid himself of M. Lugos, other events in which he was connected had taken place in Paris. Fortoto had turned his time to account, and after convincing himself that he could easily enter the yard in the Rue Vanneau, had repaired there to inspect the place for the last time, after receiving Noridet's telegram. He found the blacksmith's workshop deserted, and as it had a damaged window, an entrance might readily be effected. Thus the matter in hand seemed to him easy of execution. He was as anxious as his employer that it should succeed, and refrained from going to Montmartre till all was over.

He wished to defer the pleasure of announcing his good luck to Louise till he was successful, when he would tell her, with full particulars, what had brought him good fortune. The mulatto was so convinced of Noridet's integrity and the legitimate character of the enterprise, that he had no doubt of being able to satisfy the young girl. This attempt, which would have been better fitted for an escaped convict, seemed to him a work of justice, and, in his simplicity, he was convinced that he would perform a good deed by obtaining possession of the papers—stolen, so he believed—from M. Jules. As for the double personality of Louise's father, he had not the slightest suspicion of any such thing, and had no idea that M. Bernard, the steward of the Count d'Alcamo, could ever live anywhere else than with his employer.

On the evening of the great day he dined early and heartily at M. Pitois' establishment, and walked to the Rue Vanneau. He had donned a blue blouse and a cap, making himself look like a workman who has just finished his day's work; and he had about him all the tools he needed—a diamond to cut the window pane, a chisel, and a solid bar to raise the anvil. These were secured to his belt under his blouse. He did not take any weapons, as he felt sure that he would have no one to contend against. Indeed he would have been ashamed to provide himself with weapons to make his way into an uninhabited workshop, and in case of there being any unforeseen obstacle he preferred to rely upon cunning rather than force.

Seven o'clock struck when he entered the Rue Vanneau by the Rue de Babylone. This part of Paris is very animated at nightfall. Workmen emerge from the Vaugirard factories and spread about all the taverns of the neighbourhood, and housewives crowd the shops buying their provisions. There was a throng everywhere, and Fortoto was not afraid of being noticed. He went up the street, strolling along like an idler, but as he walked he looked around him, and when he reached the passage he felt quite sure that no one had paid any attention to his movements. He went into the house without making any haste and without turning round, with the firm step of a man who knows perfectly well what he is about; and he passed down

the passage without meeting any one. The yard was silent and deserted, and he found no difficulty in hiding behind a pile of boards. He could see the six stories of the house from the spot he selected; several of the windows were lit up; children were crying, and there was a noise of household utensils being moved about. The inmates were occupied with the evening meal, and the toilers who lived here gave no thought to the piles of rubbish in the yard.

Fortoto was leaning against the wall in such a position that he had the workshop on his right, and by stretching out his hand he could touch the window. On this side everything was quiet, and the absence of any noise or light abundantly proved that the ground floor was unoccupied. He had now only to select the best moment for action. He had three hours before him, for he had ascertained that the street door was not closed till midnight. While waiting, he pondered over his coming happiness. In telling Noridet the story of his love, he had not told him everything. He believed himself loved by Louise. Indeed he had read her love in her eyes. On the evening of his meeting with Noridet, he had waited for her in the street near the Château Rouge, and for the hundredth time had spoken to her of their marriage. Louise had teased him by enumerating all the good qualities which she desired in her future husband. He must be honest, industrious and good tempered, and her father wished that he should have some little capital to begin with. Poor Fortoto had hung his head at the thought that he would never be able to fulfil all these conditions, however Louise added: "I don't care about good looks or even as to my husband's colour," whereupon the young mulatto had begun to hope again.

"To-morrow I shall have the money to bring to her," he now thought, counting the hours as they struck, for he could hear the clock of the Rue de Sèvres church, "and I will work, and always remain honest."

Fortoto blessed M. Jules for having found him, and having guaranteed him all the happiness he anticipated, and he longed to requite his kindness. The stir in the house ceased little by little, and the lights in the windows vanished. Only the cadenced steps of the policeman were to be heard outside, and the noise of the shop shutters being put up. The time had come. Fortoto emerged from his hiding-place, and approached the window. He knew the exact spot where the casement closed inside, and he soon chose the best pane of glass to cut. In less than five minutes he had not only cut it, but removed it carefully, whereupon he pulled back the bolt inside, opened the window, and as it was level with his chest, slipped with feline agility into the workshop.

The darkness was profound. It was necessary to work without a light, and without making the least noise. He saw that the workshop was divided by a wooden partition behind which the blacksmith no doubt slept when he remained at home. He found, by feeling, that the door of this room opened on his right hand. Having made this voyage of discovery, he looked for the anvil, and found it without difficulty. It was high and heavy, but Fortoto's vigour equalled his agility, and by making good use of his lever, he soon loosened it and moved it aside. This being accomplished, he knelt down, felt with his hands, and found the joints of the tiles which covered the precious deposit. The work had now become more difficult. The chisel was needed to detach the mortar, and this was a delicate task in the darkness. More than once the tool slipped from the mulatto's hands and struck noisily against the tiles, but by patience and

skill, he at last succeeded in his purpose. One of the tiles gave way, and underneath it Fortoto could feel a long, flat box.

His delight was so great that he gave utterance to a cry. He already had the box which was to procure him the means of marrying his betrothed, when a stream of light suddenly dazzled his eyes. The door in the partition opened, and a woman emerging from the inner room appeared upon the threshold.

"Louise!" exclaimed Fortoto, trembling with surprise and agitation.

It was indeed the daughter of M. Bernard, the girl whom Fortoto loved. She was standing in the doorway, motionless and pale, with a frown upon her brow, and a fierce gleam in her eyes. She looked, indeed, like some statue of Vengeance.

Fortoto had fallen on his knees again, and his bewildered eyes turned from the face of his betrothed to the casket which he had removed from its hiding-place, and now held in his hand. The young girl slowly advanced. She carried a lamp, the light of which fell full upon the agitated features of Aurora's son. "What are you doing here?" she asked, in a voice which startled the unfortunate mulatto.

"Mademoiselle, I will tell you—" stammered Fortoto.

"Scoundrel! you came here to steal!"

"No, no! I swear to you that I did not."

"You dare to deny it!" exclaimed Louise.

"I beg of you, mademoiselle," said Fortoto, with an effort, "allow me to tell you. I came to fetch this box, but it was—it was for you."

"For me!" cried the young girl, her eyes sparkling with anger.

"Yes, for you, Louise," cried Fortoto, rising. "Yes, this casket will bring us a marriage-portion. To-morrow I shall have ten thousand francs; I shall be able to set up in business, and then I can ask your father to let you become my wife. I intended to tell you everything, and I hoped—"

But he stopped short, seeing that Louise had flushed scarlet. "Oh!" said she, in a broken voice, "you ought to have spared me this insult!" And then she burst into tears.

Fortoto darted towards her to take her in his arms, but she recoiled as if he were odious to her, and her tears suddenly ceased flowing. "You thought I would accept as a husband a man who might say to me, 'I am rich, and I bring you the money I have stolen?' Ah! you make me curse the day when I first consented to speak to you," she added, with disdain.

The unhappy Fortoto now stood before her hanging his head, and trembling in every limb. Utterly confounded, he had not even asked himself what fatality had brought Louise to the blacksmith's shop, but the thought now suddenly occurred to him. "Excuse me, mademoiselle, you do not understand me," he said, timidly. "I did not come here to steal. If there is any thief here, it is the man who detains the papers in this casket, and I did not think that I should meet you in the abode of a man capable of—"

"Proceed!" interrupted the young girl, haughtily. "You believe me to be an accomplice in some crime."

"No, no! I swear I do not, but I should like to know—"

"It is you, now, who are questioning me," resumed Louise, bitterly.

Fortoto stammered out a few unintelligible words. "Well," said M. Bernard's daughter, with an air of dignity, "I will consent to reply to you

when you have explained to me why the man who once dared to tell me that he loved me has to-night assumed the dress and provided himself with the tools of a professional thief."

The unfortunate Fortoto let the box fall, and thréw the chisel aside, but he did not reply. The words seemed to stop in his throat. "Speak, speak!" cried Louise, vehemently, "you see that I am waiting to hear you."

Fortoto made a violent effort, and in a voice so low that it could scarcely be heard, he replied: "I love you, and you told me—"

"Enough!" interrupted the young girl, with an imperious gesture.

"You told me that your father would not refuse to accept as his son-in-law a hard-working man, able to offer you a modest but certain degree of comfort. Then I went to work, and if you only knew, Louise, all that I have suffered during the past year, when I saw that what I earned was scarcely enough for me myself to live upon! I told you that I could set up in business, but it was not true, and when I left you after telling you that, when I went off, with shame and despair in my heart, I more than once longed to end my life—but—I loved you too much to die."

"Then it was poverty that urged you to this infamous deed," said Louise, sadly.

"It isn't an infamous deed," cried Fortoto. "No, I am neither a robber nor a coward. Listen to me, Louise, and judge me when you have heard me. My mother had a nursling, the son of a rich colonist of Mauritius—a white man. This nursling is my foster-brother, and he was the companion of my childhood. He helped to educate me, or rather his father did so, and he has continued to show me kindness. He came to me at a moment when I was cursing my own helplessness, and proposed to me to earn a fortune in a few days. I thought of you, Louise, and I accepted his offer."

"What can he have told you," replied the young girl, "to blind you so completely as to the act which he wished you to commit?"

"He told me," replied Fortoto, warmly, "that a powerful enemy pursued him with his hatred; that this scoundrel had robbed him of papers which compromised him and his father, the man who had me educated. Then, he asked me to recover these papers for him."

"So it was only to take some papers that you broke this window open?"

"I swear to you, Louise, by my love for you, that these papers are there, in that casket, and if you still doubt me, I will open it before you. It was to save the honour of my benefactor that I consented to come here to-night, and as for the money which Jules will give me, I can accept it without a blush, for I shall have done an act of justice."

The frown on the young girl's face slowly faded away, and her eyes, so expressive of indignation a moment previously, now seemed softened by pity. "What is this man's name?" said she.

"Jules Noridet," proudly replied Fortoto, as though that name alone would suffice to prove his innocence.

"And he told you," said Louise, without showing any surprise, "that some papers were concealed here which had been stolen from him?"

"Jules said so, and Jules is incapable of uttering a falsehood," said Fortoto, boldly.

"Then, according to you, the master of this shop is an accomplice in an infamous conspiracy," said the young girl, coldly.

As Fortoto recovered his courage he began to ask himself, anxiously,

why Louise was there. He did not venture to ask her, but his eyes pleaded for him. "I promised to reply when you had spoken," said the steward's daughter, "and I will now do so." The mulatto listened breathlessly. "You have told me the name of the foster-brother whose orders you have obeyed," resumed Louise. "Do you wish to know the name of the man whom Monsieur Jules Noridet accuses of having stolen this casket from him, in order to turn a family secret to account?" Fortoto made an affirmative sign. "Well, his name is Pierre Bernard," replied the young girl, in a loud, clear voice.

"Your father?" exclaimed Fortoto.

"Yes; my father, the best and truest of men. And now I will tell you, in my turn, why I came here. My father told me his secrets. One evening he told me that he was going away from Paris with Count d'Alcamo, and would be absent for some days. He appeared sad and anxious, and I saw that some serious trouble was weighing upon his mind. I pressed him with questions, and at last ascertained what it was that troubled him. The count, he said, had everything to fear from an infamous scoundrel, and had no weapon against him, excepting some papers proving a crime which this man had committed. 'I am entrusted with these papers,' said he, 'and, on leaving Paris, I must secure some one to watch over this precious deposit. Will you have the courage to defend it?' An hour afterwards," continued Louise, "I came here with my father. He showed me this little room, which I promised to occupy during his absence. I have kept my promise, as you kept yours to Monsieur Jules Noridet. Every evening, instead of returning to Montmartre, I have come here to mount guard over this casket confided to my father's care. My task is about to finish, however, for my father will be here to-morrow."

Fortoto gave a sigh which was like a groan.

"A little while ago," continued Louise, "I heard a noise in the shop; some one had got in. I knew that I ran the risk of being killed, but I thought I should have time to call for help, and so save the papers. I opened the door and found you here, leaning over the casket which I was ready to defend with my life."

"Forgive me, Louise!" exclaimed Fortoto, kneeling at her feet. "I had lost my head; besides it was for Jules, my foster-brother, and he swore that his cause was a just one."

"You must choose between him and my father."

"Choose!—you say choose? Am I not your slave, Louise? Am I not ready to give you my life—my honour? I am very wretched, but I worship you! I will repair the harm I have done. I will go to your father, and I will show him the same devotion that I vowed to Jules."

"You must first reply to my questions as a proof that you are sincere in all this. When were you to hand this box to your foster-brother?"

"I was to send him a telegram to-night."

"He is not in Paris, then?"

"No. He is in Normandy, at the Château of Monville, belonging to Baron Brossin."

"At Monville!" murmured Louise, "I now understand why my father did not think it safe to take these papers with him. Well, then," she resumed, in a louder tone, "you must write to him that you refuse to serve him any longer."

"I am ready to do so."

"To-morrow, you must come and see my father and tell him all that

has taken place here this evening. After that, you will do as he may direct you to do."

"Then you will allow me to see and know your father?" exclaimed Fortoto, with a transport of delight.

"Yes, and I shall be there," replied Louise.

"How happy you make me!" cried Fortoto.

"Give me the casket and accompany me to Montmartre," resumed Louise. "I cannot remain here a moment longer after what has happened, and the count's box will be safer in my room than here. I hope that your foster-brother will not take it into his head to look there for it," added the young girl with a smile.

Her eyes were now bright again, the colour had returned to her cheeks, and she gaily put on her shawl, and made ready to go out. Fortoto held the casket out to her, and looked at her in admiration. "One more question, and one more order," said she.

"Speak!"

"Have you received any money from this man?"

"Yes," said Fortoto, sadly.

"Well, then, you must come to Montmartre to-morrow evening and the money must be returned to Monsieur Noridet by then. I will not accept anything that comes through him, so you will do well to refuse his gifts." The young girl then took the casket from Fortoto, slipped her hand under his arm, and went out with him.

They parted at the door of M. Bernard's house; but at 7 p.m., on the morrow of this night of adventure, Fortoto slowly ascended the street where he had first met Louise. His heart was beating fast at the thought of seeing Louise's father and learning his fate. Like Jacob, poor Fortoto was willing to serve seven years for love's sake. His hope lay in the thought that M. Bernard, to serve his master's purposes, might need a devoted agent, and would, perhaps, consent to employ him. It was not without regret that he had renounced Noridet, and he well knew that he had exposed himself to his wrath and vengeance. But Louise had made his duty clear to him, and he no longer doubted the evil designs of M. de Mathis's nephew. Touched by Louise's eloquence, he had sworn to remain honest and for ever renounce all nocturnal attempts, secret missions, and ill-gotten money. He had, however, resolved not to take any active part against his foster-brother, and hoped that nothing would prevent his remaining neutral in case of a struggle between his new friends and his old protector. Still, as he expected an outbreak of anger on Noridet's part, he was on his guard. To begin with, he had left Pitois' restaurant, and had taken lodgings in a little hotel on the Boulevard Rochechouart. This new abode offered the double advantage of bringing him near Louise, and of throwing any one off the track who might be looking for him. Had he known that Noridet was perfectly well acquainted with Mademoiselle Bernard's abode, he would have been less easy in mind, but, as it was, he fancied himself to be safe. He had the simplicity to believe that when he had chatted with his foster-brother his desertion would be forgiven. Meanwhile, he was busy rehearsing the little speech which he intended to make to M. Bernard, and he greatly feared that he would not be able to deliver it with the same ease and assurance as his usual "catches" on the Pont d'Austerlitz.

He was walking up the street trying to put on a pair of gloves, an article he seldom sported, when he suddenly saw Louise cross over the way

towards him. "It is I," she said. "Why are you afraid of me?" she added, seeing him turn pale.

"No, mademoiselle, but I thought that you would wait for me at home to-day, and introduce me to your father. Have you changed your mind?"

"No, but my father hasn't arrived. I thought that he would be in Paris this afternoon and I am beginning to feel very uneasy. Will you give me your arm to the station in the Rue d'Amsterdam? I want to find out whether there has been any accident on the line, and I don't like to go out alone in the evening."

The mulatto did not need any begging to offer his arm, and they set out for the outer boulevard with the light step of the young and happy. Fortoto was full of joy, and would have thrown triumphant glances at the passers-by had he not been entirely taken up with his charming companion. The young girl was extremely pretty. Her soft and delicate features had unusual animation, and her eyes sparkled brightly. It was evident that she was experiencing a keen emotion. "Do you believe in presentiments?" she said presently.

"No, mademoiselle," replied Fortoto, timidly, "for I had no notion yesterday that I should be as happy as I am to-day."

"Well, I believe in them, and I am afraid that something has happened to my father. He told me when he went away that the struggle in which he was engaged was a terrible one. 'However,' he added, 'even if I die I shan't leave you unprotected. The count will take as much care of you as though you were his own child, if ever you are left alone in the world.'"

"Alone!" exclaimed the mulatto, "but I also love you and am ready to die for your sake."

"I wept when he said this," said Louise, "but I was far from guessing to what dangers my poor father was exposed. After what you told me last night, however, I begin to understand what kind of enemies he has."

The anxiety expressed by Louise now began to affect Fortoto also, and he felt doubly sad, for this day on which he had founded so many hopes was ending in gloom and apprehension. The lovers walked hurriedly along and descended the Rue d'Amsterdam to the station. There was a dense crowd at the exit, and the incessant passage of luggage and vehicles indicated that a train had just come in. Fortoto inquired and found that it was the parliamentary train from Dicppe. Louise had grown extremely pale, and no longer spoke. She had dropped her lover's arm and had placed herself so as to be able to see all the passengers as they approached. In a few moments she had reviewed them all. M. Bernard was not among them.

There were still a few loiterers hastening toward the exit, but the station was rapidly becoming deserted, and Fortoto was about to retire with the young girl, when a group of people appeared. Two porters, surrounded by several policemen, were sustaining a sick or wounded man, and rumours were already in circulation.

"It's a traveller who fell out of the train," said one person.

"Is he dead?" asked another.

"No. But he has lost his mind."

These words were exchanging near the spot where Fortoto was standing, and suddenly, a piercing shriek resounded: "My father! it is my father!" cried Louis, half mad with grief.

Fortoto wished to hold her back, but she broke from his grasp and darted towards the unfortunate victim of the accident. It was, indeed, M. Bernard.

Lividly pale, with bloody bandages about his head, his eyes quite destitute of fire, his form limp and feeble, he came forward without appearing to know where he was. When Louise threw her arms around him he did not recognise her.

The policemen hastily closed the iron gate, and whilst the young girl was sobbing and calling upon her father to speak to her, an officer of the peace questioned the mulatto concerning the wounded man. All at once, Louise, abruptly leaving M. Bernard, darted to Fortoto, and, clutching his arm, asked him in a husky voice: "Will you give me a proof of your love for me?"

"Tell me at once what you wish me to do?"

"To start, without losing a moment, for the Château of Monville, and inform Count d'Alcarno of what you have just seen."

XIII.

THE farm of La Beaudonnière was a large white house without any pretensions to architectural beauty. The windows had green shutters, the roof was covered with slate, the walls were decked with honeysuckle and clematis, and the whole harmonised wonderfully well with the Norman landscape around. A large garden full of fruit trees, and a meadow in which the grass grew without ever being mowed, completed the countrified aspect of the habitation. La Beaudonnière was no more like the luxurious Château of Monville, than the Mornacs were like the Brossins. Such as it was, however, the property was not without its value, and the ex-notary prized it less, perhaps, on account of the eighteen thousand francs which it brought in, yearly, than on account of its peaceful charm. Like all who have passed their younger years pent up in an office, M. Mornac was passionately fond of the country, and would long ago have gone to reside on this estate if his wife, who was a Parisian to her finger tips, had not preferred her garden in the Rue-d'Assas to all the groves in Normandy. At all events, however, every time the worthy notary had to renew a lease or make repairs, he eagerly started off to pass a few days at La Beaudonnière.

On this occasion he had not experienced any difficulty in getting his wife to accompany him, for Dr. Brias had declared that Andrée needed a change of air. Madame de Mathis had been left in charge of a devoted friend, her condition being still the same, and the others had come to enjoy the last autumnal days at La Beaudonnière.

This trip, so suddenly decided upon, had very nearly cost Madame Mornac and her favourite their lives, and, indeed, on the morrow of the adventure on the beach, the good lady had not yet recovered from the shock. Andrée, on the contrary, seemed to have forgotten the danger to which she had been exposed, and her health did not appear to have suffered from the terrible fatigue and emotion of the perilous excursion.

When she went down into the garden, where the notary and his wife were walking together, the usual opaque pallor of her charming face had given place to a warm flush of colour, and her large eyes had lost the melancholy expression habitual to them. It seemed as though the blood circulated more rapidly through her veins, and that some hidden passion animated her features. The change was so striking that Madame Mornac darted forward to give her a kiss, and her husband looked at her, dumb with admiration. "My dear child," said the good old lady, loading her

with caresses, "how glad I am to see you look so lovely and seem so well after such a day as yesterday ! I am worn out, for my part."

"Andrée, my dear, is a creole, but you were born in the Rue Saint-Denis," said M. Mornac.

"Instead of making fun of your own wife you would do better to go into the parlour for old Daugué, who has called, and bring him to me, as I wish to ask him some questions."

"No need of going after him," said the notary quietly ; "he is coming to us."

A man was indeed approaching, with the slow, heavy step peculiar to most country people. This tall, old peasant, with a high-coloured face and broad shoulders, was, although he stooped a little, a perfect type of the strong Norman race, which toils as bravely now as it fought in former days. His intelligent, shrewd countenance indicated his origin. He bowed politely, but with the dignity which the owner of a hundred acres of good soil thinks himself called upon to maintain, and cordially asked after the health of the family.

"Thanks, my good Daugué," said Madame Mornac, "we are all well, thank Heaven ; but we were nearly drowned, yesterday."

"Ah ! you see, madame, after Michaelmas the coast is dangerous."

"Yes, indeed, we came near perishing on your coast, let me tell you, and but for a brave fellow who got us out of our scrape, I should not be talking to you this fine morning."

"Ah, the Biville boys are solid chaps," said the farmer, drawing himself up.

"I don't know whether he belongs to Biville or not, but I know his name ; and as you are one of the old residents, you can tell me all about him."

"Oh ! as to that, madame, I can tell you all about any one for three leagues round."

"His name is Jean de Monville," said Madame Mornac, looking at the peasant to whom the young girl was listening with the utmost eagerness.

However, this name did not appear to awake any recollection in the mind of old Daugué, who repeated, scratching his ear : "Jean de Monville ! There's nobody in the town of that name."

"He's a young man, between twenty and twenty-two years of age," resumed the notary's wife : "with longlight hair that falls over his shoulders—"

"And naked feet," interrupted the farmer, "and he wears a sash and sailor's cloak ?"

"Yes, yes !" exclaimed Madame Mornac and Andrée, both at once.

"Oh, then I know him," said Père Daugué, tossing his head. "It's Jack of the Cliffs."

"But he told us that he was Jean de Monville."

"That may be his real name, but we call him simply Jean or Jack of the Cliffs, because he is always running about the rocks, in places where ever the goats don't dare to set foot."

"What does this fine young fellow do ?"

"Nothing very useful, madame ; he prefers to fish all night and poach all day, rather than plough fields and keep cattle."

"But he isn't a bad fellow, is he ?" asked the notary.

"Upon my word, that depends upon how you look at it. It is true that he has never done anybody any harm, or stolen, unless it be Baron Brosin's game—and nobody about here thinks much of the baron—but, you

know, a lad who lives all alone in an old ruin where, with respect to you, I wouldn't house my cattle, who never works, but has money just the same, why, you see, people will talk about him."

"What! he has money and he goes about barefooted?" exclaimed Madame Mornac.

Andrée looked reproachfully at her protectress.

"Yes, yes, he has," resumed the farmer. "Why, last year he drew as a conscript, but he went to Dieppe with a big bag of gold to buy himself off. This winter, the old shepherd at Biville lost five sheep on the cliff, and Jean gave him the money to buy some others at the fair at Eu."

"Come now, Daugué," said M. Mornac, "that is all stuff, you know! The lad has property of his own, or some family helps him along."

"Property? I don't know of any except an old house near the Black Rock, which is falling into ruins, and not fit to shelter an owl. As for his family, there was a story about that a long while ago."

"Tell us the story, then, my friend," said the notary's wife, eagerly.

"Why, it was said," began the peasant, "that the last of the Monville nobles went to join the army, like the rest of the fellows, when the Revolution broke out. About fifty years ago, he returned here; it was the year when the English were garrisoned here. People said, that old Monville had risen in the wars under Napoleon the First; but he couldn't have been rich, not he, for he went to live at the house near the Black Rock, on a patch of poor land which remained to him. It seems that he had got married in foreign parts, for he brought back a little chap about eight years old with him."

"But you are talking about 1815," interrupted Madame Mornac, "and all that does not concern our deliverer."

"Not yet, madame, but I'm getting on to what does. The old man died after four or five years' time, and then the son shipped as a cabin-boy, and no one heard anything about him for ever so long. The land lay waste, and the house fell to bits for want of repair. But one fine day the sailor walked in just as his father had done before him, with a child, too, and died six months after. The lad who was left was nearly fifteen, and the lawyers came to the Black Rock to poke their noses into the matter, but they found nothing there but straw and potatoes. So they let the lad alone; whereupon he began to roam about the beach, and the woods, and was soon nicknamed Jack of the Cliffs."

"But he has a right to call himself Jean de Monville," said Andrée, quickly, "as he is the last of the family, and the name is his."

"That may be, mademoiselle," said Daugué, "though I never saw his certificate of birth; but, at all events, the foolish fellow leads a life that will get him into trouble. He has been prosecuted for poaching two or three times already, and it will end badly."

"It is a strange story!" said M. Mornac, who was thinking how he could be useful to the lad who had saved his wife, "but what do people think of him in these parts?"

"Some say that his father, the sailor, left him a treasure. Others say that his money comes from smugglers whom he helps in landing their goods on the beach. Perhaps he's a little touched in the head."

"Bah! bah! Daugué," interrupted Madame Mornac, "I see nothing very bad in all you have told us, and I'll undertake to teach this fine fellow good habits. He promised to dine here with us, at twelve, and I shall preach him a fine sermon."

"To dine here, madame!" cried the farmer, with a hearty laugh, "to dine with you?"

"Why not? if there's nothing serious against him!" said the notary, gravely.

"Oh, that's not it, sir; but Jean is always dressed in the toggerie he wears on the cliffs; he feeds among the rocks or at the top of his tower, and I'll bet anything that he never sat down to table yet, like any Christian."

"We will teach him manners," replied Madame Mornac, who always believed that everything would happen according to her own wishes.

The peasant shook his head, but did not appear convinced. "Who knows where he is at this time of day?" he muttered.

"We'll find him," said the notary's wife, firmly.

"I shall go to the mayor and the sergeant of gendarmes, and inquire about him," added M. Mornac.

"Well, as for the sergeant, here he comes now with one of his men. They are running across the meadow!" exclaimed the old farmer. They seem to be in pursuit of somebody. A poacher, I'm sure!"

The garden of La Beaudonnière extended over a patch of sloping land which overlooked a meadow, and two men with cocked hats were, indeed, running after some one as fast as their heavy boots would let them.

"That is strange, indeed!" said M. Mornac, "they seem to be coming our way."

The notary was still speaking, when a stir was heard in the hedge which enclosed the garden. Ten paces away, the bushes suddenly parted, and then a man appeared, gun in hand.

"Holy Saint Mary!" cried Dangué. "It is Jack of the Cliffs!"

At this cry, and witnessing the sudden appearance of the young stranger, Andrée and Madame Mornac gave a start of alarm, indeed, the heir of the Monvilles presented himself in a condition not at all calculated to attract the admiration of ladies. He was wearing the same attire as on the day before, but the bushes had torn his clothes, scratched his face and hands, and, with his gun in his hand, he had now the appearance of a perfect brigand. His race had made him lose his breath, and he had stopped near the hedge and did not look at those who were pursuing him. As soon as he saw Andrée, he forgot the gendarmes, and his candid countenance expressed joy and surprise, mingled with a feeling of shame. Shame speedily predominated—shame at being seen in this state by the young girl whom his heart worshipped. But, in spite of his torn garments, his dishevelled hair, and glowing eyes, Jean was handsome with a wild comeliness, which would have been out of place associated with a dress-coat, and which might have frightened the guests at a fashionable gathering. Andrée, on her side, after the first moment of fright, again felt the strange sensation which had thrilled her heart on the cliffs. For the first time she understood life's great secret—love. When M. de Kergas, her betrothed, had fallen a victim to the catastrophe at Chevreuse, the young girl had wept for him as she might have wept for any friend, but her heart had never beaten at thought of the Breton officer, as now at sight of this rugged descendant of the conquerors of England.

The other witnesses of the scene seemed variously impressed by it. Madame Mornac, who was not much edified by the wild appearance of the young fellow, began, like her husband, to ask herself whether she had interested herself in a scapegrace with undue propensities for a bandit life,

and Daugué smiled with a mocking air, delighted at seeing that his opinion of Jack of the Cliffs was so soon justified. The gendarmes had understood the fugitive's game, and, in spite of their heavy boots, they promptly reached the spot where he had dived into the hedge, but they did not attempt to follow by this thorny path.

"Surrender, Jean, surrender," exclaimed the sergeant of gendarmes, "you are caught, my lad! I am going round by the gate, while Piroux remains here; so don't attempt to run off, for it would do you no good."

The notary thought it time to interfere. "Monsieur Valensole," said he to the sergeant, whose cocked hat alone was visible above the hedge, "come in with your comrade and have something to drink while I take charge of the prisoner."

"You are very kind, Monsieur Mornac, and I won't refuse, for this chap has given us a run. As you will take charge of him, we will go round by the yard."

However, as soon as the gendarmes had moved on, Jean sprang up like a deer, and was about to leap over the hedge when a look from Andrée stopped him.

"Come, come, my friend!" said Madame Mornac, approaching him, "tell us all about this business. Why are they running after you?"

"For having gone shooting in Monville forest, which is my own property," answered Jack of the Cliffs, abruptly.

"Poaching isn't such a grievous offence after all," said the notary, without paying any attention to this strange declaration on Jean's part, as regards his property, "and I shall try to settle the matter. Come, now," said the excellent man, seeing the sergeant reappear, "won't you let this young man off if he promises to stop doing this sort of thing?"

"Sorry to refuse you, Monsieur Mornac," said the sergeant, putting his hand to his hat, "but my orders are very strict. Every day that great, lazy lad goes shooting the young deer in the forest right under the nose of the gamekeepers, and Baron Brossin went to Dieppe expressly to complain to the captain."

"Come, come! Valensole," insisted the good notary, "if I answer for Jean, you will surely let him go free?"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Mornac," said the sergeant, "but are you really interested in the lad?"

"Well, he saved the life of my wife yesterday, and that of this young lady, when they were caught by the tide. I want to take him under my protection, and I have made up my mind to take him to Paris with me rather than leave him here to continue this vagabond life."

Andrée, who had her eyes on the prisoner, saw a flash of his eyes as he listened.

"If that's the case, Monsieur Mornac, I see but one way," resumed the gendarme, who looked more and more puzzled, "it would be to obtain permission from Baron Brossin to stop the action, but I don't know whether he would consent or not, for he is furious about Jean."

The notary reflected for an instant. "You are right," said he; "that is the only course. If you like, sergeant, we will go together to Monville in my trap, and I will plead this young man's cause."

"As to that, Monsieur Mornac, I am willing, but I am very much afraid that it will do no good."

"Let us try, at all events. I will have the horses put to while you drink the ladies' health."

"It is no use doing that," said the prisoner in a hoarse voice, "I won't go to Monville."

"But you don't understand me, my friend," said the notary. "I am going to ask Monsieur Brossin to have you set at liberty."

"I do not wish to be forgiven by that man," said Jack of the Cliffs, curtly.

Père Daugué was laughing in his sleeve, and the sergeant's face wore an expression of mirth which surprised M. Mornac. "I will explain matters to you," said the sergeant after a pause. "The lad is a trifle cracked; he imagines that he is descended from the ancient race of Monville, and he tells everybody that the château and the forest belong to him. The thing has reached the baron's ears, and he doesn't like it, I assure you!"

"But if Jean's mind is disordered, that is an additional reason for treating him with forbearance," wisely observed the notary; "and I am sure that Monsieur Brossin will understand—"

"I won't go," interrupted the young man violently.

"If I ask you, won't you go?" said Andrée.

The prisoner turned pale, and cast down his eyes. His hand relaxed its hold upon the butt-end of his gun, which he had been clutching convulsively, and his frame trembled with indescribable emotion. There was a mute scene of a few seconds, and when Jean de Monville raised his eyes full of infinite sweetness to Andrée's face, the young girl felt that she had conquered his wild heart. "Let us go, I am ready," he said, in so low a tone that he was scarcely audible.

"That is right, young man!" exclaimed the expansive Madame Mornac, "let my husband do what he says, and you will be back to dinner with us, so that we can talk a little about your future prospects." Jean blushed to the very ears while the good lady, without heeding the confusion of his looks, added: "Yes, yes, it is all settled! We shall take you with us to Paris, and Monsieur Mornac will find you a good situation. That will be better than the cliffs and your tumble-down house near the Black Rock."

"Yes, sir," said the young girl, making haste to speak, "I can understand that you are fond of the district whose name you bear, and love it well, but those whom you saved yesterday beg of you to care for them as well."

The prisoner made no answer, but his eyes spoke for him. André and Jean de Monville understood each other.

"Do not let us lose any more time," said Madame Mornac, going towards the house. "As soon as the horses are put to the trap you can set off with your escort, and I heartily hope that Mornac will bring you back with him."

Twenty minutes afterwards the break was proceeding towards Monville by the high road. M. Mornac had seated the young man beside him, and the two gendarmes sat opposite. The ex-notary, in point of fact, was not altogether delighted at driving out in company with a young tatterdemalion, who looked like a malefactor being taken from one police-station to another, but he had too kind a heart to let this be seen. He tried, on the contrary, to get Jack of the Cliffs to talk, questioning him with perfect good temper. But he only extracted monosyllables or curt answers in reply. As they proceeded further and further from La Beaudonnière, the wild nature of the prisoner assumed the ascendancy, and he looked like a wolf caught in a trap. Andrée was no longer there to calm him by word or look, and M. Mornac finally gave up the attempt to civilize him. The notary also had another

anxiety. He was but little acquainted with Baron Brossin, for whom he had but slight esteem, and he was not without some uneasiness as to the success of the attempt that he was about to make. As he drew near to Monville, he thought how ridiculous his break would look to the impertinent servants in the courtyard, and he remembered the high and mighty airs of the baron, and the mocking ways of Mademoiselle Henriette. He needed to recall the scene on the beach to persevere in his design of protecting his wife's deliverer. However, on reaching Monville, to his astonishment, he found the gate of the courtyard open, and saw the master of the château talking with great animation amid a group of servants and peasants.

For the majestic baron to act in this way, something of importance must have taken place. Mornac's surprise increased when he saw that the appearance of the gendarmes produced a marked effect. All eyes were turned towards the break, and M. Brossin left the group to go and meet the newcomers. He did not, at first, recognise the notary, and probably took him for a magistrate or police-officer, for, instead of returning his bow, he said: "Have they arrested the murderer?"

"What murderer?" asked the notary in amazement. "I know nothing about it. I came to talk to you about a little poaching matter. My name is Mornac. I am your neighbour at La Beaudonnière."

"Ah, indeed! Excuse me, sir," said the baron more politely. "I am so much disturbed about this frightful event."

"What has happened, then?" said M. Mornac, in alarm.

"What! don't you know? My guest, my friend, Count d'Alcama, has disappeared from the château since last night. On the beach, however, his hat was found, and a long trail of blood. Everything leads me to believe that he has fallen a victim to some murderer."

On hearing of the crime, the gendarmes jumped lightly from the vehicle, and the sergeant approached M. Brossin, as though to take his testimony.

"This is horrible," said the notary, "and I beg of you to excuse me for having so badly chosen my time. I came to ask you to pardon this young man, who has been shooting on your grounds, but I understand that at such a time—"

"This young man!" exclaimed the baron, who had just noticed the prisoner seated at M. Mornac's side. "Why, it's he! It's the murderer!"

The notary sprang up as though he had been bitten by a snake, and staggered, recoiling to the opposite end of the seat: "Oh! that is impossible! This lad can't have done the deed."

"Oh! he's quite capable of it—a robber, who ruins my forest, and threatens my keepers, a miserable vagabond who roams all night around my château—why, he was there last night—he was seen there!"

"That is true," said the peasants and the servants in one breath.

"You see that he is guilty, and I thank you, sir, for having brought him here between two gendarmes," said the baron in a harsh voice.

Jean of the Cliffs did not stir. He looked at the baron with his eyes gleaming with hatred and contempt. The worthy Mornac was paler and more disturbed than he was. The sergeant, however, made a sign to his comrade, and slowly approached the prisoner, who was still seated in the vehicle. "Jean," said he, laying his hand upon his shoulder, "I arrest you in the name of the law."

M. Mornac, in the first flurry of surprise, had not dared to protest on behalf of the young fellow, but he could not see his wife's rescuer thus ac-

cused of being a murderer. His natural sense of justice was outraged by a charge which was, as yet, unsustained by any serious proof, and he resolved to clear up the case before deserting Jack of the Cliffs. "Excuse me," he said, resolutely, "but it seems to me that up to this moment there is nothing whatever to show that this lad is guilty. I have, indeed, strong reasons for believing him to be innocent."

"What, sir, you defend this vagabond! this poacher!" exclaimed M. Brossin, who seemed greatly surprised at the notary's interference.

"Poaching is an offence, but it is not felony," said M. Mornac with lawyer-like calmness; "but be that as it may, this young man was on the cliffs at Biville at nightfall. My wife owes him her life, and will testify to it if needful. It seems to me impossible then he can have committed a murder in your château last night."

"Why not, if you please?" demanded the baron, in a sharp tone. "There are but three leagues between here and Biville, and the count must have been killed at a late hour, for he left us at eleven."

"But what motive could Jean have had to murder this gentleman whom he had, perhaps, never seen?" asked the notary, somewhat disconcerted.

"He wanted to rob him!" responded M. Brossin, shrugging his shoulders. "A man must be a stranger here not to know that the scamp lives on plunder. After killing my deer, he kills my guests, as a matter of course."

"At all events, his plunder does not seem to enrich him much," said M. Mornac, pointing to the prisoner's rags.

"Oh, don't pay any attention to his shabby appearance," said the sergeant, with a cunning look; "Jean is never in need of money, and must have a little pile somewhere."

"That is what we shall soon find out," resumed the baron, threateningly, "for I trust that an immediate search will be made in this scoundrel's den."

"We will go there at once, baron," said the sergeant, with all the gravity which his position demanded; "but there is some distance between here and the ruins which he inhabits, and while waiting for Monsieur Mornac's horse to rest, I should like to collect a few facts on which to found my action."

"I will give them to you," said M. Brossin, eagerly. "The count must have been murdered in the garden, and then thrown over the cliff."

"But how is it that his body has disappeared?" objected the notary.

"How do you know that the sea which bore it away may not bring it back at high tide?" replied the baron, disdainfully. "Now, to convince you that your honourable friend was here at the time of the crime, I will question two fishermen who saw him at midnight wandering near the ruins of the old keep at the end of the terrace."

"Could they recognise him at a distance on a dark night?" said M. Mornac, still reluctant to believe in the charge.

"I decidedly despair of being able to convince you, sir," said M. Brossin, angrily, "and you will permit me to give orders to have my carriage got ready. I wish to go in person to visit the abode of the fellow you so warmly defend."

Although the notary was not renowned, like his wife, for vivacity, he had, on the other hand, clear judgment and thorough self-possession. "As you please," he replied, without demur. "I merely think that before starting it would be as well to ask the prisoner a few questions. It seems to me that we ought to have begun by that," he added, with some little sarcasm.

During the whole of this conversation Jean had not made a motion or spoken a word. Standing between the two officers who kept close to him, he had his arms crossed, his head erect, and his eyes fixed on space. It was easy to see that his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Jean," said M. Mornac, touching his arm gently, "will you answer me?"

"Yes," said the prisoner, who started, as though awaking from a dream.

"I have not forgotten that you saved my wife and my adopted daughter, and that convinces me that you can't be guilty. I ask you to tell me the truth in order that I may be able to defend you."

Jean made a gesture of indifference.

"Come now," said the notary kindly, "explain to me what you were doing last evening when you returned here after bringing the ladies up the cliff. That is the only way in which you can justify yourself, as witnesses say that they saw you at midnight at the foot of the keep."

"That is true, I was there," said the prisoner, boldly.

"You unhappy man!" cried the notary, instinctively recoiling; "then you are the murderer! Ah, Andrée will never believe it!" he added, in a tone of grief.

At the sound of this name, which M. Mornac had uttered by pure chance, Jean turned pale, and made a movement which was at once checked by the officers. Then he raised his head and said, proudly: "A Monville never murders. I have had that man within range of my gun many times, but I never fired," he added, pointing to the baron.

"But tell me, madman that you are, what were you doing at night by the tower?"

"The tower was built under Duke Robert by my ancestor, Eudes de Monville, and it belongs to me."

"Yes, like the forest," said the sergeant, touching his forehead.

The notary became silent out of sheer consternation, and his benevolent countenance now assumed an expression of severity. M. Brossin was triumphant, and the numerous spectators of the scene exchanged in a low tone remarks hostile to the prisoner. "You have no other explanation to give me, then?" said M. Mornac, at last, and very gravely.

Jean hesitated for an instant before replying, and his frowning brow showed that he was engaged in a mental struggle.

"No," said he, at last, with an effort.

"May God judge and pardon you, then!" exclaimed M. Mornac, turning away to hide the tears which rose to his eyes.

"The dog-cart is ready, Monsieur le Baron," now said a servant approaching.

"But how are we to take this fellow?" inquired the prudent sergeant.

"On foot, with handcuffs on his wrists, like a rascal as he is!" exclaimed M. Brossin.

"Excuse me, but it is a long way from here to the Black Rock, and if we wish to get the young man to-night to the prison at Dieppe, we shall never succeed in that way."

M. Brossin seemed to care very little for this course of reasoning, but the notary felt worried, and it was obvious from his face that he hesitated between reason and feeling. Feeling carried the day. "If the sergeant is willing," said he, gently, "we will go in my trap, as we came. I should like to save this unfortunate young man the fatigue of the long walk."

"Do so, sir," said the baron in a sarcastic tone, "I shall not dispute the honour of his company with you."

The arrangement suited the officers, and they set out, M. Brossin in his dog-cart with a groom, the prisoner with his two keepers and M. Mornac in the break. The road was long, and after the town of Biville was passed it became a very bad one. Three hours elapsed before the party reached the Black Rock, and there they were obliged to alight. At the end of the steep promontory rose a building, of which it was difficult to guess the destination. This ruin might have been, perhaps, a guardhouse, a chapel, or a fort. It could only be reached by following a path skirting the cliff, and round about there extended a bleak and uncultivated track of country.

"We are on Jean's lands," said the sergeant, who liked his joke, "and his château is before our eyes."

The prisoner had not uttered a word during the entire journey, and this just did not disturb his silent indifference. The baron walked at the head of the party, with an eagerness only to be explained by his hatred for the descendant of the Monvilles, and M. Mornac sadly followed the gendarmes. In spite of the incredible avowals of the prisoner, the notary still doubted, and felt himself attracted by secret sympathy to this young savage who so bravely protected women and scorned to justify himself to men.

"At his age, and with those honest eyes of his, he cannot be a murderer," said the worthy old notary to himself. "There is a mystery here which I must fathom."

They had now reached the walls of the ruin, and the notary attentively examined this singular abode to which, at first, he saw no means of ingress.

"The carriage-entrance is on the right," said the sergeant, laughing.

In fact, on turning the corner of this strange edifice, a low cinctured doorway was seen. It was necessary to stoop to enter a vaulted hall, lighted by a narrow ogival window.

"A perfect robber's den," said M. Brossin, as he looked about the gloomy spot.

There was no furniture to be seen save a pine-wood bedstead on which a few bundles of straw were spread, some nets, and a rusty old gun. Surprise mingled with pity appeared on M. Mornac's face, while the baron aided the sergeant in his search. Jean looked on in silence at the investigation, and the notary saw with delight that his features showed no trace of apprehension. Suddenly M. Brossin raised a cry of exultation. "Here is a proof, if I know what I am talking about!" he exclaimed, brandishing a sword which he had taken from the straw pallet.

"That weapon—I don't see—" began M. Mornac.

"This weapon belongs to me," cried the baron; "it has been stolen from my house, and this scamp used it to kill the count."

"Oh, oh!" said the sergeant, "this, now, is serious, very serious, and matters are becoming bad for you, Jean! If I were in your place, I would confess everything."

"Where did you get this sword?" asked the notary, who had turned very pale.

"I found it," replied the prisoner, still indifferently.

There was a spell of silence. M. Mornac hung his head, and drops of sweat rolled from his forehead. "I think, sir, that you are no longer sure of your friend's innocence," said M. Brossin, with ironical suavity. "If,

as I suppose, you don't care to give him a seat in your break, the officers will undertake to conduct him to the public prosecutor's office."

"Excuse me, sir," said the sergeant, who did not appear desirous of escorting the prisoner on foot to Dieppe, "but I must make my report and let the justice of the peace know of this. We have a room at the barracks where we can house the lad for the night. To-morrow the branch coach will take him over."

"Agreed!" said M. Brossin; "but you must give orders for your men to stop at the château on the way. I am going to write to the magistrate to ask him to come to Monville to-morrow to confront this man with the witnesses."

All was now over, and the party set forth. The notary, greatly disturbed, approached the prisoner. "What can I do to help you?" he asked in a tone of grief.

"Nothing," said Jean. "I need no one."

"Not even those whom you have saved?" said M. Mornac, gently. The young man coloured and looked down. "From them you can accept anything," added the notary, "and if you have any request to make of them, tell me what it is. I speak in their name. What do you wish?"

"I should like to see them," said the prisoner in a stifled tone.

M. Mornac sadly wended his way back to La Beaudonnière. The grief he felt in leaving the prisoner was increased by the thought of what his wife's sorrow would be when she learnt the story. The worthy man reproached himself with having been the involuntary cause of Jean's arrest, and heartily cursed his idea of taking the delinquent to M. Brossin. For, in spite of appearances, the ex-notary with his judicious mind could not believe that the young savage of the Black Rock was a murderer. In the discerning eyes of M. Mornac, Jean's artless manner in presence of the charge justified him, instead of committing him. "A guilty man would never act in that way," said he to himself, "and this young fellow is the victim of some unfortunate mistake."

He decided that, at all events, he would interfere in the proceedings, and relate Jean's courageous conduct on the cliffs, to try to soften his judges. Meantime the most urgent matter was to provide him with money and clothing of which he stood greatly in need, and one must profit by his short stay at the barracks at Biville to do him this service. It was also an excellent chance to satisfy the wish expressed by the prisoner prior to his departure.

When the vehicle entered the yard at La Beaudonnière, Andrée appeared at the door, and as soon as she saw that M. Mornac was alone, her sorrow became visible in her face. "Bad news!" exclaimed the notary, as he alighted; "the baron was inflexible; he refused to let the poor boy off."

"Where is he?" asked Andrée in a trembling voice.

"At Biville, at the barracks, where he will remain until they take him to Dieppe."

"Then his offence is looked upon as very serious?"

"More than we thought; but everything will be arranged, I hope," said M. Mornac, who did not wish to terrify the young girl by telling her about the accusation of murder.

"But we must not desert him like this; we can't do so," she exclaimed.

"I agree with you, my dear Andrée, and I shall beg my wife to go and see him with you; the sergeant promised me that he would allow it."

"Does he know that we are coming?" asked the young girl, timidly.

"I promised him to bring you, and, in fact, the only wish he expressed was to see you."

Andrée blushed on hearing that Jean had thought of her, and Madame Mornac, who had caught the last few words, came up exclaiming: "Certainly; we will go to see him and console him, poor boy! I will get a few things together to take to him. I thought that we should have him here to dine with us and enjoy himself, and that we should teach him not to be so shy. It is a great disappointment," added the good lady, looking at her favourite, "is it not, my dear girl?"

Andrée seemed to be lost in deep thought. She was now thinking of the stranger who had twice come to her in her father's name. She remembered the day when, in the presence of Madame de Mathis at Chevreuse, this mysterious gentleman had said: "If any danger threatens you, summon me." She remembered also that on the evening of the scene on the cliffs, when night was falling, he had suddenly appeared before her and exclaimed: "Tomorrow I will come to the farm. I wish to see the man who calls himself Jean de Monville."

The hour had come but not the stranger. "He could save Jean," she said to herself, and the thought gave her courage.

Madame Mornac now went off to make her preparations, and after speaking with her husband, she agreed with him that part of the truth ought to be concealed from the young girl.

But what had become of the stranger? Had he forgotten his promise? Andrée began to fear that some misfortune had befallen him, as was the case with all the friends she had. Madame Mornac found her in tears; but she was so busy preparing food and clothing for the prisoner that she forgot to console Andrée or even to ask her why she wept. M. Mornac was more clear-sighted, and, alarmed by this excessive sensitiveness, he almost regretted having consented to an interview which might prove hurtful to his adopted daughter. He saw that it was now too late to speak, but he decided to watch over her at Biville, and spare her any painful emotion.

When they reached the gendarmerie, the sergeant was smoking his pipe at the entrance of a yard where some rosy, fair-haired children were playing. Hens were cackling round about the door; a woman was singing at the window nursing her babe. Nothing about this gay picture seemed to suggest a police barracks, still less a prison. The young girl felt encouraged.

"Good day, Monsieur Mornac!" said the sergeant, politely raising his hand to his hat; "these ladies have come to see the lad, have they not? He will be very glad to see them."

"How does he seem to bear his troubles!" asked the notary, as he alighted.

"Oh! he doesn't trouble his head about the matter; there must be a screw loose for him to take things as he does, for there is an unpleasant time ahead for him."

M. Mornac made a sign to the sergeant to be silent, on account of Andrée. "Yes! yes! I understand; it won't do to frighten the young lady," said the worthy fellow, lowering his voice. "If the ladies will walk into this room," he added aloud, "I will bring Jean to them."

"Is there any reason why he shouldn't be left alone with us?" asked the notary.

"Well, it isn't according to rule, you know," said the sergeant, with some hesitation, "but I have too much confidence in you to refuse. Besides, neither you nor I will say anything about it to the magistrate."

"No, indeed, but I sha'n't forget to speak up for you if need be, and I will go to Dieppe on purpose."

Meantime, Madame Mornac arranged her numerous packages, and Andrée gazed sadly at the high white walls behind which Jean de Monville was hidden. The idlers of the town had begun to gather about the door, and the sergeant decided to take the visitors into the large room on the ground-floor which was ornamented with a bust of the Emperor, and furnished with a few straw-scated chairs, whilst the walls had panels of pine wood. "My dear Andrée," said the notary, affectionately pressing his adopted daughter's hand, "I beg of you not to show any grief on seeing this poor lad. I know how sorry you must be to find him in such a plight, and I promise you to do everything in my power to get him out of it."

The young girl merely replied by a grateful look, but Madame Mornac made haste to say: "We shall save him, my dear child, be sure of it; my husband will look out for that, and we will see to his clothes."

As she spoke, she spread out a quantity of linen, outer garments, socks, and shoes; in fact, everything needful to attire Jack of the Cliffs from head to foot. Andrée mechanically aided her.

"Go in, my lad," said the sergeant, now reappearing, and urging the prisoner to enter the hall; "thank these ladies for coming to see you. I will fetch you in a quarter of an hour."

After having thus introduced his prisoner, the worthy sergeant discreetly retired, and Jean remained, motionless and upright, near the door. Strong emotion was visible on his face, and fever blazed in his eyes. He did not seem to see M. Mornac; his first look met Andrée's eyes. "Don't lose your courage, my friend," said the notary, "we shall not forget you, happen what may; and we could not let you go without coming to say good-bye."

"Thanks," said Jean, in a hollow tone.

"Here is something to keep you warm in prison," said Madame Mornac, pointing to the clothing.

"And here is the means to buy whatever you may require," added her husband, slipping some gold into his hand.

"I do not need anything," said the prisoner, recoiling haughtily. The notary looked surprised. "I need but one thing," resumed Jean; "I wish to speak to *her*." And as he said this, he slowly approached Andrée.

This strange request made Madame Mornac start, and the notary wished to detain the descendant of the Monvilles. "He saved my life," said the young girl, making a simple and dignified gesture which induced them both to draw back.

M. Mornac glanced at his wife. He saw that Andrée was resolute, and his heart told him that there were moments in life when conventional rules must give way. The prisoner walked to the end of the room, and Andrée followed him.

"I have confidence in you alone," said Jean, in a trembling voice. "Will you swear to me to do what I ask?"

"I swear it!"

"Do you know the ruins near the Black Rock?"

"Yes."

"Will you have the courage to go there alone?"

"I trusted that you did not doubt me?" said Andrée, raising her large eyes full of tears to the young man's face.

"Listen, then," said Jean de Monville, rapidly. "You must go in,

walk to the window which overlooks the sea, and knock three times upon the wall with a stone."

"I understand. What then?"

"When you have done that a man's life will be saved."

Pale and speechless, Andrée found not a word to reply. A frightful thought had flashed upon her like lightning. She thought that the unfortunate man had become mad. "But you, Jean," cried she, "to-morrow you will be in prison."

"Andrée," said Jean de Monville, whose voice trembled as for the first time he called her by name, "I do not fear imprisonment, for I shall know how to escape to see you again!"

XIV.

THE road from Dieppe to Monville is almost always uphill. On emerging from the Faubourg du Pollet, you have to ascend to the plateau, which crowns the cliffs. Baron Brossin's château, built near the sea, and hidden by a forest, is not easily found without a guide, and, on the morrow of the arrest of Jack of the Cliffs—the day was foggy—poor Fortoto having strode along for more than three hours, began to fear that he had lost his way. After the heart-rending scene at the station, he had helped Louise to take her almost dying father home. Painful formalities had preceded and followed this removal. It was necessary to give the police all the information they required regarding the wounded man, and in this matter Fortoto had been of great service to the girl he loved. However, on reaching the little lodging at Montmartre, which he then entered for the first time, he realised that his task was not yet at an end. "I now have no one but you in the world, and I have no hope but in you," Louise said to him. "Go at once and tell Count d'Alcamo what you have seen."

Fortoto had not hesitated. Without making futile efforts to console her, without an objection, without even returning to his lodgings, he had at once proceeded to the station. A train left at midnight, and he had just funds enough to pay for a ticket. At five in the morning he found himself on the road to Monville, and being without money was obliged to walk to the château. The weather was so misty, and there were so many turns, that he found it difficult to follow the directions given him on leaving Dieppe.

At nine o'clock, however, the fog began to clear off, and Fortoto, fearing that he was going further and further out of his way, resolved to sit down and wait at the roadside till some one passed by and directed him. Hungry and weary and disturbed by the reflection that delay might lead to his missing Count d'Alcamo, he now almost cursed the feeling of delicacy which had led him to return the bank notes to Noridet. He was, moreover, not a little uneasy as to the reception which might await him at the château. Count d'Alcamo had never seen him, and might mistrust an unknown messenger. If he questioned him closely, how could he explain the series of mishaps and chances which had led him, after being a street mountebank, to mix himself up in the affairs of a powerful nobleman? The mulatto was thus reflecting when he heard some one coming along the road. He rose at once on seeing two gendarmes approaching; he instinctively mistrusted them; however, there was no means of escape, so he sat down again near the ditch, ready to lift his cap when they reached him.

"Well, young man," said Sergeant Valensole,—it was Jean's escort whom chance had brought that way—"you must have come a long distance to-day, as you are already resting."

"I have come from Dieppe, and I think that I have lost my way," said Fortoto.

"Where are you going, if I am not over curious?" said the sergeant, examining this wayfarer, whose dusky skin and singular appearance excited his suspicion.

"To the Château of Monville, Baron Brossin's place."

"The dence you are! Why, this isn't the way!"

"It is the first time I have been here, and I don't at all know this part of the country."

"And you start off like that on foot, alone, to visit the château? That is very strange, young man, very imprudent, but I suppose that, though you have no baggage, you have your passport about you," said the sergeant mildly, reserving his last thrust for the finish of his remarks.

"A passport?" repeated Fortoto, losing countenance. "No, I haven't any; I did not know that it was necessary."

"It is never without its use, my lad, but when a man is known, it doesn't matter so much; and, as you are going to Baron Brossin's, you no doubt have friends at the château," resumed the sergeant with a cunning glance.

"Oh, I only came to speak to a person who is stopping at Monville just now."

"Then, young man, you are in good hands. We are now going to Monsieur Brossin's, and we can take you with us without any trouble. I promise you that you won't get lost again," he added, with a smile, the meaning of which was easy to understand.

Fortoto clearly realised that the gendarmes did not intend to let him go till they were sure of his identity and his intentions, and as he did not wish to present himself to the count with such an unpleasant escort, he thought it best to explain himself at once. "I am going to Monville to see Count d'Alcamo," he said, with all the assurance he could muster.

This information upon which he relied, produced the opposite effect to that which he had expected. The sergeant made a gesture as if anxious to seize him by the collar, the other gendarme drew nearer, and the prisoner, who had so far not appeared to be interested in the conversation, began to examine Fortoto with marked curiosity.

"Ah! you wish to speak to Count d'Alcamo," said Sergeant Valeusole, slowly. "Is it long since you saw him last?"

"I do not know him at all," said Fortoto, heedlessly.

"Indeed! That is very queer. You don't know him, but you come such a distance to see him! I'll venture to say that you have come from Paris."

"Yes; and I have a message for him," said Fortoto, who was becoming more and more bewildered.

"From one of his relations perhaps?" said the captain, looking keenly at the mulatto.

"No, from his steward, Monsieur Bernard."

"Ah, very good! The person who left so suddenly yesterday morning?"

"Do you know that?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"I know a great deal besides, young fellow; and to show you how much, just come here, and we will take you straightway to Monville. Go over there by Jean, who will keep you company, and let us be off."

The gendarme at once understood his superior's intentions, and placed himself on the off side of the two prisoners, and they then set out. The unfortunate Fortoto realised that he was being arrested, and vainly tried to understand the cause of his mishap. The sergeant knew Count d'Alcamo; he also knew that M. Bernard had gone away the previous morning, and the mysterious air with which he pronounced their names puzzled the mulatto greatly. The poor fellow realised that there was some terrible complication, and he became more and more confused. The prisoner who walked beside him kept looking at him stealthily; and Fortoto asked himself whether this man who was thus being escorted with fettered hands was not implicated in the misfortune which had befallen Louise's father. However, the party marched on, and leaving the main road for a bridle path, quickened their pace, so that at the end of three-quarters of an hour they saw the roof of the château rise above the trees.

At the moment when they were entering the grand avenue, the sergeant slackened his pace to give some instructions to his comrade, and the two prisoners remained for an instant alone.

"So you know Monsieur Bernard?" asked Jean.

"Yes; I am going to marry his daughter," replied Fortoto at once, although he wondered at the question.

"Then you are devoted to him?"

"As though he were my father."

"I believe you," said Jack of the Cliffs, looking closely at Fortoto; "and if you are attached to Monsieur Bernard, you will do as I tell you."

"What must I do, then?" asked Fortoto.

"Refuse to reply if you are questioned. Those are Count d'Alcamo's orders."

Before Fortoto had time to reply, the gendarmes drew near, and all further explanation between the prisoners became impossible. Fortoto was obliged to hide his surprise, and follow his companion in misfortune. Words were becoming as incomprehensible to him as events, and he began to believe that he was dreaming. Why had he been arrested? Why had the count given any order to a young man who, according to all appearance, was under arrest for some serious offence? Without altogether deciding to comply with Jean's singular advice, Fortoto resolved to be very careful in his replies if questioned. They had now reached the gate of the château.

"The magistrates have come and you are expected upstairs," called out the doorkeeper, who hastily opened the portals as soon as he saw the gendarmes. "What! have you caught another culprit?" he added, catching sight of Fortoto.

The sergeant only replied by a significant wink, and he began to talk in a low tone to his comrade. The result of this chat was not long delayed, and Fortoto's surprise increased when he found himself shut up alone in the porter's lodge, with the porter on guard outside. It was evident that the prisoners would be questioned separately. "If they take so many precautions there must be something very serious the matter," thought Fortoto to himself, becoming more and more alarmed; and he vainly tortured his brain trying to divine what it could all mean. His uncertainty lasted as long as his detention, that is to say, rather more than an hour. At the expiration of that time, the gendarmes came to open the door and led him to the château across the yard. The servants had come out to look at him, and their threatening looks made the unfortunate mulatto more

confused than ever. Indeed, poor Fortoto was more dead than alive when the sergeant ushered him into a large parlour, where three men dressed in black were seated round a table. Baron Brossin, easily recognised by his imposing bearing and his manners, was also there, seated in the embrasure of a window. However, when Fortoto looked round him for his companion in misfortune, he did not see him. He began to understand. "A crime has been committed here," he thought. "This young man has been accused of it, it is thought I am his accomplice, and we shall suddenly be confronted with one another; but what is this crime?" This it was impossible for him to guess. He replied, however, without any great embarrassment to all the usual questions about his age, his nationality, and his name; and when the magistrate asked him for what purpose he had come to Monville, he told him the simple truth.

"Then you have been sent to see Count d'Alcamo on behalf of his steward, who left the château yesterday morning?" said the magistrate, dwelling upon the words.

"Yes, sir," replied Fortoto, surprised at this insisting, "and I was requested to see Monsieur d'Alcamo as soon as possible."

"You lie with rare impudence," said the magistrate, coldly; "for you know very well that Count d'Alcamo was murdered last night." "Murdered!" exclaimed Fortoto. "It is impossible! By whom, in Heaven's name?"

"Perhaps by the person who sent you here."

"What do you mean?"

"By Monsieur Bernard, who disappeared the same day as his master."

Fortoto started indignantly, and was about to explain himself very vehemently when the words of Jack of the Cliffs returned to his mind. He had the courage to remain silent. "If Monsieur d'Alcamo is alive and is in hiding," he thought, "it is because he has an interest in being thought dead; and if I tell everything I know I shall perhaps compromise Louise's father."

"Speak," said the magistrate, "and tell us where to find Bernard, who so badly selected his time for leaving Monville, and for sending you here."

"If he is the man you accuse, I protest against such slander, and I refuse to reply to you," cried Fortoto, exasperated.

The magistrates looked at one another, and the baron said in a low tone: "It is the same system as that of the other rascal. You may be sure, gentlemen, that they know one another, and have agreed together."

This opinion seemed to be general. "I warn you," said one of the magistrates, who had not yet spoken, as he placed his hand upon a paper lying on the table, "that I shall at once sign this warrant if you persist in remaining silent, which I look upon as a confession of complicity."

The alternative was a terrible one, and Fortoto hesitated for a moment in cruel doubt. Silence meant acceptance of all the consequences of a capital accusation, but speaking would perhaps involve Louise in this dark affair. "Do as you choose," said he, in a firm voice; "I am innocent, and I have nothing to fear."

"Bring in the other prisoner," said the magistrate to the sergeant; and when Jean came in, with his eyes calm and his head erect, the official added to Fortoto: "Do you know this man?"

"I saw him for the first time an hour ago."

"Did you know that he was accused of being the murderer?"

"I learn it from you now."

"Monsieur Bernard might have told you, as he spent the night of the crime at the château."

Fortoto did not reply, but he looked at Jean, trying to read his eyes. The vagrant's glance so clearly told Fortoto to muster courage that his resolution became firmer. "And so," said the magistrate, "you persist in remaining silent?"

"I have said all that I have to say."

"Very good. We will resume our interrogatory later on. Sergeant, take both prisoners to Dieppe, and have them locked up in the jail. Here is the warrant," added the magistrate, signing a printed sheet which lay before him.

The moment was decisive. However, an imperious glance from Jean of the Cliffs once more enabled Fortoto to remain firm.

Half-an-hour afterwards the two prisoners were on the way to Dieppe with their escort. The gendarmes, after examining Fortoto, concluded that he was too agile and too muscular to be allowed to remain without handcuffs, and the mulatto had to undergo the humiliation of having his wrists secured, which added to his sufferings. He walked sadly along, his head hanging, and his heart heavy, beside Jean, who seemed much less affected. Fortoto thought of Louise. What would she do, thus left without news, without assistance, and with her father dying, perhaps, beside her?

Fortoto was beginning to realize the existence of some vast plot to entrap all those who had anything to do with Count d'Alcamo, and he feared being crushed like a grain of sand between the wheels of some terrible machinery of intrigue. Around him all was doubt and darkness. Noridet's angry face, the severe-looking judges, Count d'Alcamo struck down by some mysterious hand, M. Bernard dying—all passed before his eyes in a painful picture. Little by little his faith grew shaken, and he began to repeat having so soon obeyed the equivocal orders of a person unknown to him. Still each time that he stealthily glanced at Jean's proud and open face, he again felt inclined to believe in him, and clung to hope as the drowning clutch to a straw. He would have liked to question his companion, but he knew that the moment was not favourable, and that so long as the officers were near at hand he would get no explanation.

Jean walked on with a firm step and an indifferent air, as if he had not been manacled and guarded as a criminal. He had not once glanced at his companion, and seemed to have made up his mind to make the journey without opening his lips. They were now approaching Dieppe, and already the old château, which overlooks the town, showed its high walls proudly towering above the lofty cliffs on the western side. Twenty minutes sufficed to reach it, and Fortoto saw with despair that the moment was approaching when the doors of a prison would be closed upon him. The sergeant quietly chatted with his comrade. The prisoners were too well secured to attempt flight, and he contented himself with making them walk in front of him without pressing too closely upon them. Thus gradually the two young men gained a few paces of advance, and all at once Fortoto was roused from his sad reflections by a nudge in the side.

"Listen to me without turning towards me," said Jean, in a low, but distinct tone. Fortoto made an involuntary movement at first, but immediately resumed his mournful attitude. "You did not speak before the magistrates, and I now know that I can rely upon you," resumed Jean, in the same curt and careful manner. "Before three days are over, you will be at liberty."

XV.

AFTER the interview with Jean, M. Mornac, his wife, and Andrée, returned dejectedly to La Beaudonnière. Andrée had remained thoughtful, and her preoccupation was observed by her friends. The romantic turn which events had taken somewhat annoyed the ex-notary. He could not forget that the unfortunate Jean had saved his wife and adopted daughter, and he considered it his duty to help him in his terrible difficulties ; but, on the other hand, he discovered in Andrée a tendency to exaltation, which alarmed him greatly. Since the tragedy at Chevreuse, the good man considered himself her guide in life, and her future had become his main preoccupation. With his calm and upright mind, he had naturally planned for her the peaceful happiness of some marriage conformable with the usages of society, and he witnessed, with the keenest grief, the dawning of an irrational love. His wife, to whom he communicated his apprehensions, did not, however, look upon Andrée's impassioned outbursts as anything serious, and thought that she could soon set the matter right.

"You don't understand anything about young girls and their ways," said she to her husband. "I'll have a talk with Andrée, and you'll see that all this is merely girlish nonsense. At her age I was madly in love with a sub-lieutenant of dragoons, but that did not prevent me from marrying a notary."

On the strength of this reasoning, Madame Mornac thought fit to go and see Andrée in her room. The good lady had prepared a speech intended to nip this love affair in the bud, and she had no doubt whatever as to the success of her eloquence. To her great surprise, she found the young girl dressed to go out, and tying the strings of her bonnet. This unexpected sight made Madame Mornac forget the exordium which she had prepared. "Where are you going, little one?" said she, embracing her affectionately. Andrée blushed, looked down, and did not reply. "Come, my child," added the lawyer's wife, making the young girl sit down beside her, "sit there and let us talk a moment. You must have something to tell me."

Andrée looked at her protectress, and simply said : "Yes, madame."

"There ! I was sure of it !" cried Madame Mornac, gaily ; "come, tell me everything, my love !"

She seated herself in an arm-chair in the attitude of a person who expects to hear a long story. But her expectations were not realised, for the young girl, instead of entering into difficult explanations, said with a firmness that made her start : "I love Jean de Monville."

"What Monville ? That—that unfortunate young man ?" exclaimed Madame Mornac, who had been on the point of bestowing quite another qualification upon the prisoner.

"Monsieur Jean de Monville saved our lives," said Andrée, gravely.

Madame Mornac made a strong effort to command herself, and succeeded in remaining calm. Gaiety with her did not banish shrewdness, and she very clearly realised that the young girl required to be managed with exceeding care. "My dear child," said she with perfect good temper, "I will not reproach you ; but I must ask you whether you are already engaged to this young man ?"

"Engaged ?" said Andrée, with lively astonishment.

"Yes. Does he know that you love him ?"

"I have not told him so, but he understands that I do, just as I understand that he loves me."

"Then," continued Madame Mornac, without exciting herself, "let me preach to you a little bit. It is my right and my duty, in the absence of your poor godmother," she added, tenderly pressing Andrée's hands in hers.

"How kind you are!" murmured the young girl with emotion.

"You know nothing of the world, my poor child, and at your age girls believe that life is made for love. You are but eighteen, and you listen to the dictates of your heart. That is quite natural, and I once thought as you do, but I afterwards learned that domestic happiness is made up of many things which you know nothing at all about. Shall I explain myself?" said she, laughing.

"I beg your pardon, madame," replied Andrée, with singular seriousness, "but I do not believe that what you speak of could prevent my marriage with Monsieur de Monville."

The notary's wife could hardly help smiling; however, she resumed, without being disconcerted: "A man should, in the first place, have a name and a position."

"The one I wish to marry is the descendant of a noble and illustrious family. He is noble and he is brave enough to be able to resume his rank in the world."

"I should be glad to believe so," continued Madame Mornac, quietly, "but he is poor, and—excuse me for saying this to you, Andrée—at the present time you are as poor as he is."

The young girl's face evinced emotion.

"I did not mean to offend you, my dear child," added the worthy old lady. "Our fondest wish is to repair the misfortune of the lost will, and to secure your independence—"

At this moment, however, Madame Mornac paused in amazement. Andrée had risen, and was opening a casket placed upon the table. "You see, madame, that I am rich," said she, handing her protectress a sheet of yellow paper.

"How did you come by this fortune?" exclaimed Madame Mornac, who saw that the paper was a state bond entitling the possessor to an income of twenty-five thousand francs invested in the funds.

"It was sent me by my father," said Andrée, gravely.

"Your father! but he was shipwrecked; he left your poor mother without resources, and when she died you had to live with your godmother."

"I will tell you everything, madame," replied the young girl.

She now related the scene between herself, her godmother, and the stranger at Chevreuse, and ended by showing Madame Mornac the seal bearing her father's crest, which had been given him by her mother on their wedding-day, and left in Andrée's hands by the stranger. "This is strange indeed!" said the lawyer's wife; "but you have been wanting in confidence as regards us, my child, in hiding this singular adventure."

"Forgive me, madame, forgive me!" exclaimed Andrée, excitedly. "I have often wished to tell you of it; the gentleman sent to me by my father permitted me to do so, but he spoke of obstacles, dangers, and enemies, and so I kept my secret."

"As well as the conversation which you just had with Jack of the Cliffs," said Madame Mornac, in a tone of loving reproach.

"Madame," replied the young girl, who seemed greatly moved, "Mon-

sieur de Monville gave me a mission, and when you came here I was about to fulfil it."

"A mission?" exclaimed the notary's wife with the utmost surprise. "Where were you going, in Heaven's name?"

"To the ruins near the Black Rock."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Andrée," said Madame Mornac, "do you know what charge is brought against the man whose orders you are about to execute?"

"He is charged with having shot over the estate belonging to Monsieur Brossin, I believe. What does that matter to me?"

"Well, the man you call Jean de Monville is accused of murder and theft," said Madame Mornac, who had kept this stroke in reserve as a final resource.

"That is impossible!" cried Andrée, in a tone of indignation.

"To-morrow he will be locked up in prison with other criminals, and later on he will be tried and condemned, perhaps. Do you persist in going to the Black Rock?"

"I do," replied Andrée, in a husky voice.

Madame Mornac raised her hands to heaven and vehemently exclaimed: "Ah! why is he not here, this man who said that he came in your father's name? why isn't he here to tell you that you are rushing on to ruin?"

"He is here," replied the young girl. "On the evening of the day before yesterday, near the cliff, and after Jean had rescued us, I saw him with Monsieur Brossin, whose guest he must be at this very time."

"Did he speak to you?"

"He told me that he would come on the morrow to La Beaudonnière to be introduced to you."

"But he has not come?"

"No," said Andrée, sadly.

"Is he tall, very dark, rather past middle age?"

"You know him?" exclaimed the young girl.

"Listen to me, Andrée," said Madame Mornac, earnestly, "and when I have spoken, you will be at liberty to do as you see fit. The man whom you speak of, your father's ambassador, calls himself Count d'Alcamo. He did not come here yesterday because during the night he disappeared from the Château of Monville. It is believed that he has been murdered, and the person accused of this crime is Jack of the Cliffs."

"Murdered! he!" cried the young girl in astonishment.

"Forgive me, my dear child, for grieving you like this, but I love you too well," said Madame Mornac, "to let you commit an act of serious imprudence."

Suddenly Andrée, who had seemed for some moments in deep thought, sprung to her feet. She was pale, and her eyes sparkled brightly. "Where are you going?" asked Madame Mornac, in astonishment.

"To the ruins near the Black Rock," replied the young girl, and disregarding her protectress's entreaties, she hurriedly left the room.

The westerly wind swept over the deserted heath and bent the reeds upon the summit of the cliff. The coast stretched afar on either side in a long white line, and the promontory of the Black Rock set a gloomy bar across the horizon of this wild landscape, in which life and animation were want-

ing. There were no flocks, no shepherds. Merely a goat or two browsing on the sparse grass. The sea itself was grey and sad, and rolled in with a monotonous beat. The wild cape looked like some accursed spot, and yet a woman's figure stood out against the dark sky. She walked on rapidly, wrapped in a Scotch plaid which the wind drove against her slender frame, while her streaming veil mingled with her long brown hair. She advanced with her eyes fixed on some distant spot, without once looking back and without heeding the precipice yawning at her feet; the fishers on the beach who saw her glide along the summit might well have taken her for the spirit of the cliffs.

However, a man, clad in black, followed her at a distance, as if wishing not to draw any nearer to her, and a coastguard, seated at the foot of a furze bush, bowed to him, recognising the owner of La Beaudonnière. It was indeed M. Mornac, who, informed by his wife of Andrée's strange freak, had not wished to detain his adopted daughter, nor yet to abandon her alone to the risks of her imprudent excursion. He had followed her from afar, and was now watching over her without showing himself. Nothing would have changed the determined girl's resolve, and the astounding announcement upon which Madame Mornac had so relied had produced an effect which she was far from expecting. The charge against the prisoner had not made the slightest impression upon Andrée's heart. She was sure of Jean's innocence, and like all women who love, she only beheld her aim in life without caring for the obstacles. However, the news of the sudden disappearance of Count d'Alcamo had seemed to her a revelation. The mystery which had enveloped her lover's acts and words had been suddenly dispelled, and her ardent imagination had risen to infinite conjecture. She pictured her unknown protector saved by Jean de Monville, who was accused of having killed him. She pictured Jean free and happy again, and a presentiment showed her, among the persecutors of the man she loved, that odious Baron Brossin and Jules Noridet. They had all appeared to her like phantoms in a dream, and Andrée had no longer hesitated.

She had gone off without being detained by Madame Mornac, who was beginning to think that her mind was unsettled. She had started alone, on foot, across the deserted plateau. For three hours she had been walking on without feeling the cold which mottled her delicate complexion, or the stones which cut her delicate feet. Like the martyrs of old to whom faith imparted the strength to endure frightful torture, the young girl, sustained by her love, braved fatigue and danger alike.

She easily found the road which she had already followed on the day of her terrible adventure on the beach; and the ruins of the Black Rock, scarcely noticed when descending the Biville road with Madame Mornac, now seemed to her like a mysterious spot where her fate would be decided. As Andrée drew near, however, she experienced that inexplicable feeling which sometimes stays the bravest—the fear of the unknown. What would she find behind these crumbling walls which threatened to fall upon the visitor imprudent enough to venture near them? Would it be necessary for her to descend deep stairways, and hunt in darkness for the place where she must give the signal? Her creole nature shrunk from the thought of feeling owls and bats brushing against her face, or of touching damp, slimy stones, and breathing the icy air of a vault. It was purely physical repugnance which she felt, and if her frame shuddered in spite of herself, her heart remained firm, and her thoughts clear. She repeated to

herself in a low tone the words spoken to her by Jean de Monville, like a soldier going to battle murmurs the prayer taught him by his mother when a child : "You must go in and knock three times," thus had the prisoner spoken. He had not talked of dark passages, or subterraneous passages, and the young girl, taking courage once more, reproached herself for having lost energy even for an instant.

On reaching the ruins, she gazed with astonishment at the strange building which some lord of olden time had, by a strange caprice, perched like an eagle's nest on the border of the cliff. The wall which stood in front of her, upright, solid, and pierced with loopholes, resembled the front of a bastion. She at last turned the left corner, and followed the western wall. This had partly fallen beneath the scourging of the terrible winds from the open sea, and up above there were breaches here and there ; however, the base had remained firm and intact. The young girl went slowly along, and reached the part which overlooked the sea. Even as magnetism lends somnambulists the strange power of walking on the edges of slippery roofs, so Andrée's love hid danger from her eyes. Below her, heather blooms swung in the void ; smooth, thick moss yielded beneath her weight, and the blast from the sea bent her frail figure, but she forgot that death might be lying in wait for her, and her eyes did not quit the wall which extended on her right. Half way along this wall a grating with rusty bars screened an ogival window. "It must be there," murmured Andrée, starting back.

Her peril had been of but short duration, yet a cry had arisen from the plateau, for M. Mornac had seen everything, and he had for a few seconds thought that his charge was about to fling herself over the precipice. Andrée's excited state of mind made the supposition justifiable. However, the wind from the sea carried the notary's shout of fright away, and when the young girl turned, he had disappeared behind the reeds. Andrée thought herself alone, and made once more a survey of the ruins. This time she walked on more resolutely. She realised that the entrance must be on the eastern front, which she had not yet inspected. The height at which she had seen the grating had reassured her. It was evident that a window ten feet above the soil could not light a vault. So the young girl boldly turned the opposite angle of the edifice, and reached the low door by which the prisoner had gone in with his guards that same morning.

She, in her turn, now entered without hesitation, and found herself with surprise in a well lighted apartment. Mystery is incompatible with light, and Andrée, who had been thinking of dark vaults and narrow passages, was unprepared for the sight of this commonplace-looking hall, which very much resembled a guardroom. And yet, it was here that Jean had lived. The straw pallet, the fishing-nets, the rusty gun, were still there. The gendarmes had only taken the sword away, as a proof of the crime. Andrée's heart sank, and tears filled her eyes at sight of the wretched abode of the man she loved with all the strength of a lofty soul. "Ah ! I will save him !" she cried, walking towards the place where she had been told to give the signal.

Several stones were lying about the rough pavement of the room, and the young girl only had to stoop to pick up a flint which in form was not unlike a hammer. The moment had come. The wall was there before her, and the secret she sought was hidden behind the blocks of granite below the window. At the moment of knocking Andrée hesitated a little. What apparition would the signal bring forth ? Would the stones part and show

some spiral staircase, or would she discover the secret treasures of the ancient lords of Monville? The young girl's hand trembled and her heart beat to suffocation. Suddenly, however, her face flushed, her eyes grew bright, and she raised her arm, murmuring the last words which the prisoner had said to her: "When you have done that, you will have saved a man's life." So she struck the wall with all her might, giving three blows at equal intervals. Then she waited.

The granite vibrated with a strangely sonorous sound, but the wall did not part, and no apparition came forth to put the young girl's courage to the test. She remained standing near the window with her neck stretched forward, her ears attentive, listening to the echoing sound, which gradually diminished, and finally died away.

The silence which succeeded was frightful. Andréc did not dare to move. It seemed to her as if she had committed a sacrilegious act, and troubled the dead in the grave. Suddenly, however, a strange noise seemed to resound below the wall. It seemed like a distant groan, a plaint of anguish which arose from the depths of the old edifice, a desperate appeal lost and smothered in some massive vault. Andrée felt a chill at her heart, and a shudder shook her. The signal had been heard. A man was there, a prisoner, dying, perhaps, and he appealed for help. The young girl passed her hand over her brow, as if to dismiss a terrible vision, and, approaching near enough to touch the wall, she listened again. The noise had ceased. Was it an echo that she had heard, one of those strange acoustical effects often to be observed in ruins. This doubt gave her the courage to knock once more. After a few seconds the cry was renewed, but it grew weaker. This time it seemed like the death-rattle of some unfortunate being, buried alive, who feels air and strength alike fail him. At the same time Andrée experienced a strange sensation. It seemed to her that the wall against which she leaned had trembled, that the stones shook as though they had yielded to internal pressure. She quickly recoiled and remained with her eyes fixed upon the blocks of granite which had seemed to shake at contact with her body. Was the old pile about to disclose some mysterious vault? But this strange impression passed by in a moment. The wall was motionless again, and the young girl thought that her over-excited nerves had deceived her. The silence was still unbroken, and she asked herself if she had dreamed. Soon, however, remembrance of the situation came back to her. "I swore to Jean de Monville that I would do as he desired, and save the man who is shut up here," she said, and bringing her reason to bear upon what surrounded her, she again went round the hall. She looked at every stone, she examined all the crevices between the disjointed blocks. But it was time lost. The walls retained their secret, and the young girl seated herself in despair at the foot of the window. She hesitated about knocking a third time, when suddenly a slight noise caught her ear, and on looking up she saw M. Mornac standing at the door of the hall.

"Forgive me, my dear child, for having followed you here," said the worthy old gentleman, "but I could not make up my mind to leave you alone amid these ruins any longer."

"I have nothing to fear and nothing to hide," replied Andrée, quickly.

"Oh, I do not wish to know anything," softly replied the notary, "and, since you seemingly run no danger, I will retire, my dear Andrée, and watch over you from afar."

"Stay!" cried Andréc, deeply touched by this kindness and devotion,

"I came here to fulfil a sacred mission. A man is shut up in these ruins, and if I don't deliver him he will die."

"A man? Impossible!"

"I do not know who he is. Perhaps it is the person whom Jean is accused of having murdered, perhaps, some one whom he saved from the sea. I don't know. But what I do know is, that I just heard his voice, and he called out for help."

M. Mornac's face assumed an expression of sincere grief.

"Ah! I see!" exclaimed Andrée, "you think that my mind is unhinged. Well, then, listen!"

She struck the wall with all her might, and, with her arms extended, her head bent, her eyes sparkling, she waited. A death-like silence followed the noise of the blows on the stones. M. Mornac looked at her with an expression of deep pity and said nothing, for he feared that by speaking he might disturb her troubled heart. Andrée was growing visibly paler, and trembling so violently that her teeth chattered. "Too late!" she murmured, "I have come too late!"

She would have sunk to the floor if M. Mornac had not caught her in his arms and carried her out of the hall. The sharp breeze from the sea soon revived her, and she ended by bursting into tears. This was a salutary crisis. Andrée's overstrained nerves relaxed, and she was able to begin in a calmer voice the narrative of her adventure. M. Mornac listened to her with patient attention, and as she spoke felt doubt arise in his mind. Calm reason told him that Andrée must have imagined the sounds which she said she had heard, but, on the other hand, there was so much mystery about Jean's story, that he began to believe in the possibility of some strange sequestration. "If you are not mistaken, my dear child," he said, in a grave tone, "if any one is really shut up in these ruins, it is certain that his prison does not communicate with the apartment we were in just now, for Jean would have given you the means of entering it."

"That is true," said the young girl, in a low tone.

"Don't you think, like me, that this building which touches the extreme edge of the cliff, must have a mode of ingress on the beach?"

"You are right," cried the young girl; "the road is there on our right; in a few moments we shall be at the foot of the cliff. Come!"

She had already taken a step forward, but she stopped on seeing that M. Mornac did not stir. "How do you know," said the worthy man, "that we shall not exceed Jean's wishes, by hunting for this secret entrance? Perhaps he merely wished to give a signal to the person hiding here, and don't you fear you may harm him instead of serving him by finding out his secret?"

"But that cry of agony," said the young girl, "that heart-rending appeal which still rings in my ears—"

"Listen to me, Andrée," said M. Mornac. "I promise to leave you free to act as your heart dictates. But to-morrow, I will go to Dieppe and ask permission to see our prisoner. If you authorize me to tell him about our visit to these ruins, I will question him, and perhaps he won't refuse to tell me the truth."

"And when you know everything," asked the young girl, "what then?"

"I will return here with you, my dear child, and whatever Jean may wish done, we will do together."

"You are the best of men," cried Andrée, throwing her arms about M. Mornac's neck, "and you will save us all."

"Meantime," said the notary, smiling "it will be as well for us to return to La Beaudonnière. It isn't advisable that any one should meet us here, and I think that I hear some people talking on the road leading up from the beach."

"Let us go," said the young girl.

M. Mornac had been right. There was a buzz of conversation below them, and they had taken but a few steps, when they came upon the whole Brossin family, coming along on the road from the beach. Bows were exchanged with a shade of coldness on the part of the baron. However, his wife and daughter came towards Andrée. "Have you recovered from your fright, my dear beauty?" said the baroness, mincingly. "My poor Henriette is still quite a sufferer." This seemed true, for Henriette had greatly changed and seemed to be a prey to incipient fever. Andrée fairly pitied her and was about to express her regret when the baroness added with her usual tact: "I suppose you know that your saviour turns out to be a scoundrel? I see that, like ourselves, you have come to look at his den."

Andrée coloured, and drew nearer M. Mornac.

"At all events," continued the baroness, "my daughter was saved by Monsieur Noridet, and that consoles me for seeing her unwell."

"I am proud of having been saved by Monsieur Jean de Monville," haughtily rejoined Andrée, as she turned away with the old notary.

"Ah!" muttered Henriette, "she loves him. I shall at least be able to avenge myself on some one."

XVI.

It was the evening of the third day, and Fortoto, in prison at Dieppe, had not yet seen anyone but the jailer who every day brought him his meagre supply of food. He had in vain asked to be interrogated, and inquired what turn his matter was taking; he had only received the alarming answer: "There is an order to keep you in solitary confinement." Being an ex-police-agent, he was well able to understand all the bearings of this terrible order. There was no possible means of writing to Louise, of communicating with Jack of the Cliffs, of receiving news as to the count, M. Brossin, or even Noridet. Fortoto was buried alive, as it were.

He knew, besides, that these severe measures were only adopted in very serious cases, and he therefore felt very anxious. He spent his days cursing his unfortunate journey to the Château of Monville, and his nights in thinking of his betrothed. What would Louise Bernard think of his non-appearance? What would become of her with her father as he was? Of all the prisoner's anxieties, this was the greatest and the most bitter; for he trusted that the mysterious disappearance of Count d'Alcamo would finally be cleared up. "In that case," thought he, "I shall be turned out with as little ceremony as was shown me when I was brought here. But who knows," he added, "how long I may have to remain here?"

He still thought a little of Jean's promises and predictions as to his being free in three days' time; but by dint of reflecting upon the enigmatical words of the young man who expressed himself with the conciseness and obscurity of a Delphic oracle, he ended by believing that he was somewhat of a madman, and no longer relied on his aid to get him out of his difficulties.

As an additional annoyance, the young fellow, having been arrested with

out a copper in his possession, had not been able to procure any comforts from the jailer, and was reduced to the meagre prison fare. The only privilege granted him—that of having a cell to himself—did not help to console him. He would have greatly preferred living in common with the other prisoners, so as to hear some news from outside, for the absolute silence to which he was reduced, proved particularly painful. His cell, moreover, was a disagreeable one. It was a long, narrow room, furnished with a straw mattress, a stool, a table, and a pitcher of water, and lighted by a window with iron bars. It was paved with tiles in a dilapidated condition, and was located on the first floor, in a corner of the building, and the window overlooked the yard, which served as a walk for the other prisoners. Twice a day Fortoto listened to their exclamations and songs with envy. He tried to recognise Jean's voice; and, failing, he surmised that, like himself, he must be in solitary confinement. They had been separated immediately after leaving the clerk's office, and the mulatto fancied that his companion had been led to a cell on the ground floor; but he was not absolutely sure of this, and he thought it useless to ask the jailer, who would certainly not have answered him. He spent his time singing Béranger's songs, notably "The Swallows," which had some bearing upon his own situation. That evening he had repeated for an hour, as he walked up and down, the melancholy refrain:—

"Ah! you remind me of my native land,"

and two or three times it seemed to him that he had heard a voice on the lower floor echoing back a reply. But he did not venture to carry the experiment any further, and, as usual, sadly went to bed at sundown.

This, to Fortoto, was the saddest hour of all. He shut his eyes, but sleep did not come, and the night often passed without any rest whatever. Like all prisoners, he soon grew observing, and all the noises around him became familiar. He knew the hours of the rounds, the precise moment at which the sentinels were relieved; he recognised the steps of the jailers in the corridors; he distinguished the rattling of the keys, anticipating the *veille*, which sounded in the morning from a huge bell, placed, very much to Fortoto's discomfort, above his very window. The slightest unusual stir necessarily caught his attention, so quick had his ear become.

Thus he had been for twenty minutes or so stretched out upon his pallet, and was turning and twisting wearily, without being able to sleep, when he fancied that he detected an almost imperceptible rustling, which seemed to come from below. It seemed as though some one was scratching the floor. Fortoto thought at first that a mouse was roaming about his cell, and as he had not had time to accustom himself to these prowlers so dear to Latude, he coughed loudly in order to frighten the animal away. But instead of subsiding, the noise increased. It was probably made by a man, and Fortoto determined to find out if this were really the case. He gave three knocks at intervals, according to masonic custom, with which he was familiar, and, strange to say, these three knocks were immediately repeated.

There was no longer any doubt; some prisoner shut up on the lower floor was trying to enter into communication with him, and was carrying on some mysterious work. Who was this neighbour who was endeavouring to penetrate into his dungeon, instead of attempting a direct escape? But one man would think of Fortoto under these circumstances, and that man was Jack of the Cliffs. However, three days of captivity had made Fortoto very mis-

trustful, and he was already afraid that some trap was being laid for him. In any case, prudence advised him to wait, and so he waited, that is to say, he rose softly, and listened with more attention. It was not long before he distinguished the sound of iron grating upon stone. It was evident that an attempt was being made to make a hole in the ceiling below—that is, the flooring of Fortoto's cell. The mulatto could not understand how the person at work could have reached it, for the lower cell, if similar to his own, must be at least ten feet high. However, he finally concluded that Jean, if it were he, had set his stool upon a table, and that, thanks to this impromptu scaffolding, he had succeeded in reaching the ceiling with his tools. The execution of this manœuvre was easier to understand than the motive of it, and Fortoto held himself ready for any event.

The work seemed to advance very rapidly. Every stroke of the tool which was in operation below already made a cloud of dust rise in Fortoto's cell, and the loosened tiles were beginning to part. The point chosen by the prisoner appeared to be the corner of the cell near the window, so that the hole would open but a few inches from Fortoto's bed.

While thus following with anxiety the progress of the unknown toiler, another more familiar sound reached him from the passage. The heavy steps of a jailer were drawing near, and the young man suddenly remembered that the first night-round was at hand. There was not an instant to lose in warning the toiler below, and a proper signal was not easily to be thought of on the spur of the moment. However, Fortoto made up his mind to give a series of hurried knocks with his heels.

He relied upon his neighbour guessing what this meant, and he was right in doing so. The tool which was demolishing the floor ceased work at the very moment when the bolts began to grate, so that when the jailer thrust his head into the cell he heard nothing suspicious. Fortoto had had time to stretch himself on his pallet again, and pretend to sleep. "Good!" he muttered, as soon as the door had closed. "There will be five hours' peace, at least. The next round won't take place before midnight, and between now and then I shall know what is going on below."

After a few moments' silence, he heard three low knocks, which seemed to ask: "Has the danger passed?" He knocked vigorously in reply, as much as to say: "Fear nothing!" And this language was understood, for the work began again immediately.

Indeed, the man who was piercing the floor now worked with extraordinary ardour, and the thin layer of plaster and laths which sustained the tiles could not long resist. Less than a quarter of an hour after the jailer had retired, Fortoto, who followed the progress of the work with feverish anxiety, saw one of the tiles start away. A means of communication had been opened. Fortoto now expected to hear the voice of the companion sent to him by chance, and he was already bending down to listen, when he started with surprise at seeing a hand pass through the narrow opening. In the dim light there was something ghostly in the appearance of this hand. Its fingers held and waved an object which Fortoto could scarcely distinguish, and though he merely had to put out his hand to take it, he did not dare to stir. Presently, however, a sharp sound was heard on the flooring, and the hand disappeared. Then Fortoto had the courage to rise, and after feeling about on the tiles, he found a pointed piece of iron. He understood what was meant. A tool had been passed up to enable him to work on his side. Hesitation was impossible. Like the unseen toiler

he was seized with feverish eagerness. He took up the bit of iron and began to loosen the tiles to enlarge the hole.

Fortoto was both strong and skilful. In a few moments he had cleared a space a foot square, and he saw that his neighbour was still demolishing below. He could merely see his hands, which held a short chisel, for his face was still hidden, and he did not speak. He was both silent and invisible. At the end of ten minutes or so the opening was large enough to allow a man to pass through, and then the worker below began to raise himself up by his wrists. His head was already above the level of the floor, and Fortoto was trying to distinguish his face, when a hasty step was again heard in the corridor. Fortoto merely had time to catch at his straw mattress, throw it over the hole, and stretch himself upon it, at the risk of suffocating his unknown friend. The rough voice of the jailer was now heard. He was peering through the peep-hole in the door. "So you go to bed with the hens, eh? Are you asleep already?"

"What is it? what is it?" asked Fortoto, pretending to wake up all of a sudden. He realised, with great distress, that the weight of his body was full upon the head of his unknown neighbour, who had not had time to withdraw it. "Heaven grant that he won't cry out!" thought he.

"To-morrow," said the jailer, in the same surly tone, "you will go down stairs to the workshop with the others. So be prepared—at six, sharp."

The wicket was then abruptly closed, the sound of his footsteps died away, and Fortoto hastily changed his position. His heroic neighbour had not stirred or uttered even a sigh, but it was high time to free him, for he was stifling. His face was not yet to be seen. Only a mass of light hair and two strong hands clutching at the edges of the hole were visible. Fortoto caught him, however, by the shoulders and prevented him from falling into the lower cell. In a few seconds he had recovered, and was then able to hoist himself into the room. As soon as he had reached the floor he threw back the long hair, which fell in disorder over his face, and in the dying light of nightfall Fortoto recognised Jack of the Cliffs. He was not startled, for he had already divined who his neighbour was. "So it is you!" said the mulatto in a low tone, looking with admiration at his daring companion in misfortune.

"Didn't I tell you that you would be free in three days' time?" said the new-comer quietly. "This is the evening of the third day."

"But how did you get any tools, and how did you know that my cell was above your own?" demanded Fortoto; "how is it that the noise you made was not overheard?"

"We have no time to lose," interrupted Jean. "Let us get away from here instead of talking."

"Get away? How?" replied Fortoto; "the wall is three feet thick, the door is solid, and at the end of the passage there is a watchman's post."

Jean did not listen to him, but leaped upon the table and looked upward. "He is certainly mad," thought Fortoto.

And, indeed, with his pale face, torn garments, and flowing hair, the descendant of the barons of Monville looked like a lunatic. Fortoto no longer doubted his madness when he saw him bound up like a cat, seize hold of the window bars, and remain motionless, with his face against the panes.

"He will be caught along with me," thought Louise's sweetheart, "and we shall both be put in a subterranean dungeon. I should have been wiser if I hadn't meddled with my neighbour's affairs."

He had not time for much reflection, however, for Jean alighted from his post of observation with astonishing agility, and placing his hand on Fortoto's shoulder, said quietly :

"I have found the way."

"What way?" demanded Fortoto, in astonishment.

"The way to escape. We have the window and the rope."

"But there is an iron grating to the window."

Instead of replying, Jean pointed to a file which had helped him to make the opening in the floor. "But the rope serves for ringing the bell," added the mulatto.

"When the bell rings we shall be far from here," said Jean, in a firm tone.

There was so much boldness about his manner that Fortoto felt conquered. It required some courage for him to follow his new friend in an attempt so full of peril. The order to descend on the morrow to the workshop, which the jailer had just given him, was certainly a good sign, for he would no longer be kept in a cell by himself, and the change of situation seemed to presage that he would soon be set at liberty. No doubt the authorities had begun to suspect that he was not guilty. Now, to plunge into dangerous adventures with an unknown man meant compromising a well-grounded hope for a very doubtful chance of escape. Innocent people do not generally try to scale walls, and Fortoto would have thought it wiser to trust to time and to justice. His thoughts were probably legible on his face, for Jean said to him, after a short silence :

"You can stay if you like. But I shall go, and I will take news of you to Mademoiselle Bernard."

These words, spoken in a tone of perfect calmness, made a much deeper impression upon Fortoto than reproach or complaint would have done. The man who devoted himself to the common cause with so much courage and simplicity deserved to be followed, and Fortoto already reproached himself with having thought of abandoning him. "If I let him face danger alone, I shall be a coward, and, besides, Louise will despise me," he muttered.

"Make up your mind quickly," now said Jack of the Cliffs.

"I am ready," replied Fortoto, resolutely.

"Help me, then, to place the stool upon the table and the table near the wall."

In the twinkling of an eye the furniture was thus arranged under the window, and Jean, seated on the top of this scaffolding up which he had climbed, set to work, while Fortoto firmly supported the stool. The sash with its panes of glass opened inside, and the bars were set in a grating fastened on both sides to the wall. Jean immediately attacked the stones with his tools, and Fortoto, who followed the operation with curiosity, was literally astounded. The instruments almost noiselessly caught at the layers of plaster, and Jean so dexterously threw the fragments of cement into the cell, that nothing whatever fell outside. Three quarters of an hour sufficed to dislodge the grating entirely. Fortoto could not believe his eyes, and asked himself, not without some uneasiness, whether his companion had acquired this skill in practising burglary. But it was now too late to think of scruples like these. Jean handed him the iron work, and then stretched out his hand to seize hold of the rope which hung before the window.

"Take care! the bell may ring," cried Fortoto in agony.

Jean shrugged his shoulders and began softly pulling the rope so as to draw up that part of it which hung below the window. As it slowly came up from below he gradually slipped it into the cell with one hand, while with the other he held it lax against the wall near which it was secured to the bell. "Now," said he, with perfect coolness. "I will go first, as it is the more difficult to manage."

Thereupon, without waiting for Fortoto's reply, he began to stretch the upper part of the rope with great care. It was wonderful to see him cautiously weigh upon the cord so as to bring the tongue against the side of the bell without a sound escaping. A single false movement, too strong a pressure, and all would have been lost. But Jean's dexterity was equal to his audacity. He succeeded in preventing any shock, and after two minutes of this exceedingly delicate work, the tongue was close against the metal, and did not stir. There had not been the slightest tinkling. It was now only necessary to keep the bell quite horizontal during the perilous ascent. "Pull strongly, but don't jerk," whispered Jean.

Fortoto did this successfully, and Jean, when he thought the tension great enough, gradually relaxed his hold on the rope so as to leave all the resistance in his companion's hands. "Now listen to me," said he, rapidly. "The pressure must remain equal while I go up, as I intend to do. If you don't weaken, I shall get up without any accident, and when I am above I'll hold the bell tongue. Then you will only have to tie the rope to the foot of the table and climb up as fast as you can. By the way, when I have reached the roof, and am master of the bell, I will pull the rope three times."

"Suppose that your strength gives out, or that you slip on the roof," said the mulatto, timidly.

"Well, in that case, all will be over. You must remain here and say that I forced you to let me escape; and as you are innocent, they will end by releasing you."

"But if you come to grief—which Heaven forbid!—have you no relatives to whom you wish to send a message, nothing to confide to me to tell any one?"

Jean hesitated for a moment, and his face expressed great agitation. "No," he murmured, as if speaking to himself; "he made me swear to tell the secret to *her* alone, and by this time *he* must be in safety." Fortoto waited anxiously.

"I thank you," now said Jean de Monville, in a louder tone. "If I die, think no more of me; return to Paris and be happy. Are you ready?" he added, seizing hold of the rope.

"Yes," replied Fortoto, in a voice which evinced his emotion.

Then, without losing an instant, Jack of the Cliffs passed out of the window, boldly seized hold of the cord and began to climb up by the strength of his wrists. Fortoto, with his legs firmly set against the inner wall of the cell, his arms drawn in and his body thrown back, resisted with all the strength of his muscles. The great difficulty lay in keeping the cord entirely motionless, and the success of the attempt at flight hung literally on a thread. Fortunately, although not extremely muscular to outward view, Fortoto really possessed uncommon vigour. Besides, danger fired him, and doubled his energy. He straightened himself with one last effort, and bore, without flinching for a single instant, the immense weight of Jean's suspended body. Sweat rolled from his brow, his features contracted, and his body quivered, but he held firm; and with his dusky skin, he looked like a bronze Hercules.

This lasted for nearly three minutes, which seemed ages to him, and at last he felt the weight disappear, and three pulls in succession told him that Jean had succeeded in reaching the roof. The bell had not sounded, and the worst was now successfully accomplished; but it was none too soon. Such an expenditure of strength had exhausted Fortoto, and, after solidly fastening the rope to the foot of the table, he sunk down upon his mattress. Before setting forth upon the same perilous route, he would have been only too glad to rest, and gather strength; but he felt that Jean could not wait for this. He conquered his fatigue by means of the hope which swelled his heart, and feeling bolder he clutched at the rope, and began to raise himself with his hands and knees. Then alone did he realise the incredible amount of skill and vigour displayed by Jean in reaching the roof without accident. The rope, firmly stretched, now came at so sharp an angle from the overhanging roof that Fortoto found himself suspended, almost horizontally, in space. To increase the difficulty, his hands had but little power in grasping the thin and slippery hemp. If it had now been necessary to prevent the bell from ringing, it would have been idle to make the attempt. The savage of the Black Rock alone was capable of accomplishing such a feat. However, although Fortoto had no need to fear giving an alarm, since his courageous companion was holding the tongue of the bell, he had great difficulty in making the ascent. His wrists gave him great pain, blood rushed to his temples, and clouds passed before his eyes. Vertigo came upon him little by little, and for fear of being drawn below by the terrible madness which tempts people to throw themselves from a height, he dared not look beneath him. The ascent lasted some time, for above the cell there were some high garrets. The night, besides, was dark, and Fortoto, who was climbing with his face towards the sky, could scarcely see the vague outline of the pentroof, stretching beyond the wall above him. The journey seemed to him an unending one, and he more than once asked himself whether it would not be better to die than to continue suffering thus; but at last a low voice, that of Jack of the Cliffs, called out to him, saying:

"Be brave!"

Fortoto once more began to hope, and to take strength. He saw that the darkness had deceived him, and that the goal was at hand. A last effort brought him to a level with the waterspout, and the two friends found themselves face to face, for the heroic Jean, in order to keep the tongue of the bell from moving, had been obliged to lie down flat upon the sloping roof with his arms stretched out, his head hanging over the edge, and his feet higher up. The bell was, fortunately, solidly suspended from a strong iron brace, which stood out from the cornice, with crossbars which now served as steps for Fortoto. By dragging himself softly along, he at last managed to reach the roof.

"Lie down upon your back and rest," said Jean, as calmly as though they had both been seated upon the Biville meadows.

"But what shall we do now?" asked Fortoto, trembling with agitation.

"I will set things right."

Then while the exhausted Fortoto was stretching himself out, his companion extended his arms and moved the clapper so dextrously that the bell resumed its proper position at once. "Now you must wait for me," said Jean. "I must first find a route to get away from here."

"No, no," said Fortoto, at once; "you have already exposed yourself alone, and I wish to share the danger."

"You shall, I promise you ; but at this moment you would be in my way instead of helping me."

"What are you going to do ?"

"I am going to find a way to escape, as I just told you."

And then, without awaiting Fortoto's reply, Jean began to climb up the roof, and soon disappeared behind a high chimney. Fortoto found himself alone once more. He was overcome with fatigue, and wondered what means Jean would resort to in order to complete the success of their attempt. "I will follow him, whatever may happen," he said, and, while he thought of Jean's courage, a faint whistle attracted his attention. He quickly turned, and saw, just above his head, his new friend, seated astride on the roof. Almost immediately afterwards, an object, which he could not clearly see, slipped along the tiles and touched his hand. He felt it, and saw with surprise that it was a knotted rope. To catch hold of it and hoist himself up to Jean on the summit of the roof was the work of a moment. His adventurous companion had taken his post upon the highest point. "I have all that we need," he said, calmly, when Fortoto had taken his place beside him. "I have found a ladder and this rope."

"But the yard is below and the patrol path on the left. Whichever way we go we shall be taken."

"We sha'n't go down either to the right or to the left. We shall leave by a staircase and a doorway." Fortoto again began to think that Jean must be mad. "Come," said the latter, beginning to climb along the roof. He went on slowly, and with great precautions, and Fortoto followed him, imitating all his movements. They thus dragged themselves to a sort of platform sheeted with lead. This was the point where two of the four buildings which surrounded the courtyard met at right angles. When Jean reached it he began to listen.

The regular sound of measured steps was faintly but distinctly heard, and seemed to come from the foot of the outer wall. It was evident that some sentinel was walking in front of the prison, and that the least noise would betray the fugitives. Fortoto did not dare to breathe or stir, when his companion turned and made him a sign to approach. He made haste to obey, but unfortunately his foot slipped and loosened a tile which fell into the street. The sentinel, at once, ceased walking, and the night was so still that the prisoners heard the sharp click of his gun as he cocked it. Quickly the two fugitives stretched themselves upon the platform. As it was so dark it was very difficult to see them from below, still an over zealous sentinel might fire haphazard, and the keepers would run out at the sound of the shot. Fortoto began to think himself lost, when he suddenly heard the mournful mewing of a cat. Jean's imitation was so perfect that Fortoto himself was taken in by it, and the trick proved entirely successful, for the sentinel resumed his walk, grumbling about the grimalkin on the roof, who rattled tiles on his head. No stir was apparent in the prison. The danger was past. Jack of the Cliffs immediately rose, and pressed his companion's arm, pointing to a white point discernible a few yards below the platform. "That is the way," said he, in a whisper.

Fortoto did not understand ; but Jean, without giving him time for reflection, made a sign to him to follow, and began softly descending the slope of the roof. In a few seconds they both reached a square opening from which the top of a ladder projected. On the edge of this skylight, which was not closed by glass, there was a bucket full of plaster, a trowel, and other objects used by masons. It seemed probable that the workmen employed in repairing the

roof came to their work without crossing the galleries and passages reserved for the prisoners. To escape it was only necessary to find out by which way they came and went. "I will go down first," said Jean, "and when I am off the ladder, I will whistle three times for you to come down."

After coiling the knotted rope around his waist, he set foot on the upper rungs, and disappeared into the depths of the dark, well-like opening. The descent was safely made, and the signal was not long in coming. Fortoto went down in his turn, and the fugitives found themselves on a floor which was so encumbered that they did not know where to set their feet. Jean now drew a match from his pocket and a candle, and, for the first time, ventured to strike a light. It was absolutely necessary to find out where they were, and in this garret a light could not betray them. A glance showed where they were. The place was full of sacks, empty hogsheds, and logs of wood of every size and shape. Chance had brought them to a store-room where a great number of useless objects lay about. It seemed very unlikely that the night rounds visited this deserted place, so they were, at least, almost sure of not being surprised, still the most difficult part of the matter was to get out of this place of refuge.

Fortoto anxiously and curiously observed his companion, trying to read on his face whether he had cause to hope or fear. Jack of the Cliffs had already begun to make the tour of the garret, and Fortoto contented himself with following him without asking any questions. Suddenly Jean began to reflect. The peculiar construction of the place had suggested an idea to him. He had remarked that the platform outside was precisely at the intersecting point of two wings of the prison, and he believed that this corner was set apart, from roof to basement, for some special use. It was, probably, a sort of neutral ground where the prisoners never set foot, and which the watchmen, consequently, never visited. Below the garret there must be some store-place for provisions. There might be a laundry, and, perhaps, a staircase. "Well?" asked Fortoto, anxiously.

"We are on the right road," said Jean, laconically, and he continued his inspection. As he advanced, however, his brow clouded, and after making the rounds, he returned to his starting point without saying a word. "There is no door!" at last remarked Fortoto, sadly.

It was true. The garret appeared to be without an exit. "Still it is impossible," said Jean, at last, "that those hogsheds can have been brought in here by way of the skylight."

"How were they brought then?" said Fortoto, in a tone of discouragement.

"I don't yet know, but I will find out." And Jean began to look about him with those keen eyes of his, accustomed to finding gull's nests in the cliffs. "We are saved," he at last cried, stooping eagerly; "there is a trap-door."

And, indeed, amid all the beams and casks there was an iron ring. Fortoto joined his hands in rapture, and immediately fell on his knees beside his all-discerning friend, who was occupied in closely examining his discovery. He had not been mistaken, and the two friends set to work to raise the trap-door by tying the knotted rope to the ring. When at last it was opened, they looked down and saw a wide space. Fortoto took up the candle which Jean had placed upon an empty hogshhead, and approached to light up the opening, but his friend pulled him hastily aside. "Look!" said he.

Fortoto timidly projected his head, and saw an uncertain flicker. It

was a reflection, but the light which produced it remained invisible. There was no room for doubt ; it was evidently a fire lit for the use of the prison. Was it kept up by the watchmen or by some workmen ? Was it used to warm a guardroom ? All these suppositions seemed equally admissible, and none of them were calculated to comfort the fugitives. It might be, however, that this distant light came from a stove in the basement. Only the day before the governor had given orders for the prison to be heated, as the cold weather was setting in. If the light had no other cause there was some chance of avoiding an unpleasant meeting, for a calorifere could hardly be watched all night. However, at the moment when Fortoto was beginning to hope, a strange noise made him shudder. A mournful sound arose amid the darkness ; it was like a long cry alternating with a sort of rattling. "Some one is being tortured !" exclaimed the mulatto, looking at his friend.

Jean, however, simply seemed amazed. He reflected, and finally said that they might be near the infirmary. Corporal punishment was not allowed and there could be no question of torture. However, if they were near the infirmary and this was some one groaning, they could not descend, for they would be captured, so it was better, perhaps, to return to the roof and try to find some other outlet. While still puzzling their heads as to the cause of the noise, a different sound fell on their ears, the grating of a big key in a rusty lock. Some one was entering or leaving the room below. This noise again died away and no one appeared. So it seemed evident that the person had gone out, and not come in. No more groans were heard, and the fire still burnt brightly. "It would be better to be arrested down there," said Jean, in a resolute tone, "than to wait here till they come to find us. At all events let us go down and chance it."

Fortoto sighed. He had lost all hope, and cared little whether the inevitable catastrophe took place in a garret or in a cellar. Jean unwound the rope around his waist and fastened it at one end to a heavy piece of wood. Then, when it was firmly secured, he let it fall slowly through the aperture. It proved to be long enough, and nothing stirred on the floor before. "There is no one there," said Jean, with suppressed delight.

"Can it really be so ?" exclaimed Fortoto, joyfully.

But his fearless companion, instead of replying, let himself down, and said : "Do as I do."

When Fortoto saw Jean descend into the depths below he did not wait to reflect whether the rope was strong enough to bear the weight of two men, but followed his friend. They alighted on the floor.

"Look !" now said Jack of the Cliffs, stifling a laugh.

The two friends simply found themselves in the prison bakehouse. There was the dough all ready ; the fire and the oven. The mysterious groans had been those of a man who had just gone off, and who, like all French bakers, had been making a groaning noise as he kneaded his bread. The question now arose, where did the door which the baker had closed behind him, lead to.

Jean approached the massive portal, examined it carefully, and saw that there were some slits in the wood. The safety of the two friends depended on what might be on the other side of this door. Jean applied his eye to a hole and looked out. "The street's outside," he said, joyfully, "and it is Heaven that has brought us here."

The mulatto thought that he must be dreaming. Could liberty be so near ? liberty, for the sake of which they had run such risks ? Was it in-

deed behind this worm-eaten door? With one last effort they would find themselves free again. Fortoto was breathless with joy, and Jean, though calmer, was radiant. "Time is precious," said he; "the baker may return," and so saying he took up the chisel which he had used to such good purpose.

"Let us go!" said Fortoto, eagerly.

But his companion stopped him. He had just caught sight of some workmen's blouses in a corner, and would not neglect this chance of disguising himself and his companion. In an instant they had slipped the blouses over their other clothes, and Jean then cast a last look around him. The place communicated with the other prison buildings by an inner door, and was merely separated from the loft by the trap. It was probable that the bakers came in the evening to prepare the prison bread, and in the morning returned to carry it away. There was still a little time left, unless, indeed, the bakers arrived very early. Jean went to the door, and he was about to attack it with his chisel, when he heard a heavy step in the street.

"We are lost!" murmured Fortoto.

"Wait and see," said Jean.

The man coming near was singing an old Norman song. He was probably some drunken stroller or seaman out late at night, and now returning to his ship. The fugitives anxiously listened, but the singing ceased, and some one put a key in the door. Several attempts made to turn this key demonstrated that it was no jailer coming in, but some one who stumbled and was obliged to hold on to the wall. The liveliest delight shone on Jean's face. He guessed that the new-comer was merely a drunken man, and that no violence, however slight, need be resorted to. Both he and Fortoto now crouched against the wall. The lock yielded at last, and the door turned slowly on its hinges. It was very dark outside, and the prisoners at first distinguished nothing. But almost immediately a man emerged from the shade, and came into the circle illuminated by the glow of the fire. Jean had guessed correctly. The baker had, it seemed, gone to take a drink at some tavern, and had, indeed, indulged in so many potations that he was in a pitiable condition. "That's funny," said he, in a thick voice, "I couldn't find that rascally lock, and now I can't get in."

He was indulging in a series of remarkable capers on the door-step, opening and shutting the door in the most eccentric manner. Jean was afraid that he would end by turning the key again and falling on the pavement outside. To avoid being again shut up the prisoners must lose no time. They glanced at one another, and at the moment when the door was once more partly opened, they both darted into the street. At the same instant the door swung back, and the baker rolled inside the room, without seeing them, falling with his arms outstretched on the floor. Jean quickly closed the door again, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. He then paused for an instant. Nothing was to be heard but inarticulate grumbling.

The drunken baker was evidently not in a condition to give the alarm, and it now remained for the prisoners to make off at full speed. Fortoto raised his hands to heaven, but Jean had lost none of his composure. On seeing him so calm you would have thought that he had foreseen all the odd incidents of this now successful flight. Chance had brought them to the only part of the prison not watched by the sentries. They were in a dark lane, and had nothing to fear but a meeting with some watchman.

"Can you run fast?" asked Jean.

"Yes, indeed," answered Fortoto, and as he gave this reply Jean started

off at full speed. The mulatto, who had recovered all his agility, now that he found himself free, did not allow his friend to get ahead of him. Not knowing the town, however, he would have been perplexed to get out of his difficulties without assistance; but Jean seemed accustomed to the labyrinth of narrow streets which forms the old part of Dieppe, and in a few moments had brought Fortoto to the port. Here the fugitives drew breath.

The harbour was almost deserted, and with their blue blouses they did not fear attracting the attention of the few people who were walking near the water. On the day of his arrival at Dieppe by rail, Fortoto had remarked that the port had to be crossed to go to Monville, and he saw with surprise that Jean went towards the jetty. He followed without remark, however, and his confidence in his energetic companion was such that if he had seen Jean plunge into the sea he would have unhesitatingly done the same. They reached the water by following the wharf and the channel which communicates with the open sea. At last Jean stopped and leaned over the parapet. He undoubtedly found what he wanted, for he went rapidly down a flight of steps. Several boats were moored below, and it needed but a moment to jump into the nearest, to loosen it from its moorings, and seize the oars. Fortoto took his place lightly, and held himself in readiness to obey his new-found captain.

All this had been done with such promptness and decision, that a Custom-house officer who was walking near by leaned over the parapet and looked quietly on, taking the fugitives for two fishermen who were going to meet the tide. The boat had two sets of oars, and at a sign from Jean, Fortoto began to second him vigorously. The mulatto had boated on the Seine, and was a good oarsman. As for the descendant of the barons of Monville, he acquitted himself of his duties like some professional seaman. The waves bore them out into the open, and in three minutes they had doubled the jetty, and, thanks to the darkness, were soon out of sight.

Fortoto, in spite of his faith in his companion, now began to ask himself with a certain amount of anxiety whether Jean proposed going to England in such a nutshell as that in which they found themselves. It was not that the danger of the trip alarmed him, but all his wishes leaned towards Paris. To see Louise again was his only thought. For her sake alone had he consented to all the dangers of the flight, and the direction taken by the boat bore him away from the capital with every stroke of the oars. After a quarter of an hour spent in silent efforts, Fortoto could no longer refrain from questioning Jean. "Where do you intend landing?" he asked, timidly.

"At four leagues from here," replied Jean, "and with this wind and tide we shall soon be there."

This reply raised a weight from Fortoto's mind, and encouraged him to say: "But when we reach land, are you not afraid we may be arrested?"

"Nothing will be known till daybreak, and when the police start from Dieppe to look for us, we shall have already been a long time in safety."

"I don't know whether I can remain in this part of the country," said Fortoto. "I am awaited in Paris, and I should be very glad—"

"But to travel you need clothes and money," quietly replied Jack of the Cliffs, "and I will give you both to-night."

This wonderful coolness reassured Fortoto, who set to rowing vigorously, without asking another question. He had, besides, already noticed that the boat, instead of going out into the open, was following a north-easterly

course. From time to time lights shone upon the shore, though the Dieppe beacon was already far away. Jean seemed but little disposed to talk, and Fortoto was busy thinking of Louise. After a long time, however, he thought he could detect that they were making for the shore.

"Do you know how to swim?" suddenly asked Jean.

"Oh! I could keep myself up for a couple of hours in the water," replied Fortoto, joyfully, for he realised that they were reaching their destination.

"Come, then," replied his friend.

Fortoto did not hesitate to jump into the water. He did not ask himself why Jean abandoned the bark, or calculate whether the land was far off. He would have followed his new friend to the end of the world; and, besides, he had undergone too much peril that night, to trouble himself about a mere swim. He began cleaving the water vigorously, but accustomed though he was to the exercise, he soon saw that Jean was much the better swimmer of the two. Fortoto had not gone a hundred fathoms before he was distanced. He even remarked that his companion swam but slowly in order to let him come up, and he renewed his efforts. The sea was calm but the tide was running out, and besides, they had to struggle against a somewhat strong current, which bore them in the direction of Dieppe. Fortoto, however, felt able to hold out a long time, and yet he would have been glad to know where he was going. Just as a road always seems longer when you have never previously traversed it, so this swim seemed to him an endless one. The weather was cloudy, and nothing was to be seen beyond a few fathoms. All lights had vanished from the coast, and, indeed, the shore was completely hidden. Fortoto swam bravely on in the darkness, and as soon as Jean got too far in advance of him he called him back, for he did not wish to lose his saviour and guide. The boat, carried away by the tide, had almost immediately disappeared, and it was clear that Jack of the Cliffs, in leaving it in the open, wished to let the only trace of his flight disappear. It was necessary therefore to reach the shore or perish.

Half an hour passed without Fortoto experiencing any feeling of fatigue, for he had taken longer swims in the Seine though under different conditions. However, on leaping into the sea the fugitives were already heated. The climbs and descents in the prison, the race across the town, the long row, all this exercise had particularly made the mulatto over excited. It was near the end of October; the water was cold, and Fortoto gradually felt himself overpowered by the torpor which follows on a sudden chill, and he was obliged to swim more slowly. His legs were first affected, then his arms, and finally his chest, as if by the clutch of an icy embrace. He resisted with all his strength, and for some time was still able to keep up beside his friend. He made it a point of honour not to weaken in order to remain worthy of his companion; and besides, when he thought of Louise he longed to live. While moving his stiffened limbs as well as he could he tried to peer through the darkness which prevented him from seeing the shore. Sometimes dark rocks seemed to rise before him, but the wind drove off the clouds which presented this deceitful appearance, and a general gloom again enveloped the sea. Not a star shone on high, and the distant glow of the Dieppe lighthouse was the only bright spot visible. There was not a wave. The water rippled noiselessly, and its stillness was lugubrious. Discouragement oppressed poor Fortoto still more than the cold. He ceased to struggle at last, and felt that he was sinking rapidly. Jean, who still swam on with the same vigour, had a short

advance. A few more seconds and the mulatto would have lost sight of him. Now solitude meant death. "Help!" cried he, in a husky voice.

Jean was fortunately near enough to hear this last appeal. He turned, and a rapid stroke brought him near Fortoto. It was time he intervened, for in another moment the unfortunate mulatto would have sunk; however, Jean seized him by the arm and held him up in the water till he could draw breath. "Place your hands upon my shoulders," said Jean, when his friend was able to hear him, "and let me carry you. Merely move your legs."

Fortoto mechanically obeyed, and Jack of the Cliffs began bravely swimming onward with his added load. It was marvellous to see him advance slowly but surely, with equal, regular motion. Fortoto, who had not recovered his strength, but felt more composed, seconded him to the best of his ability, that is to say, that he weighed upon him as little as possible, and drove back the water with his feet. Jean did not even appear to be fatigued.

After what seemed a long time, Fortoto thought that he heard the noise of the sea breaking over the shingle, and soon a whitish mass rose up against the black background of the horizon. Land was near, they were safe, and Fortoto silently thanked Heaven which had so visibly protected them. Night is deceitful as to distance, and the coast was nearer than he had thought. In less than a quarter of an hour both fugitives felt the ground beneath their feet; and Jean resolutely walked towards the cliff, which rose before them. Fortoto, who had never seen the beach before, was utterly unaware where his friend was taking him, but it was no time to ask questions, so he followed without saying anything. After ten minutes' walk, which the shingle made difficult, the two young fellows reached the base of a rock which jutted out like a gigantic spur of the cliffs. "You must wait for me here," said Jean, suddenly stopping.

"What! you desert me?" cried Fortoto in his first moment of surprise.

"No, I shall not desert you. But I am going to bring you clothes and money, and you will be told how to reach Paris without danger."

"Clothes! money! on this deserted coast?" muttered Fortoto, completely taken aback.

"Can you walk any further to night?" asked Jean, without explaining himself further.

"Yes, yes, I think—I hope so," stammered out Fortoto.

"You have seven leagues to go to reach the first halting-place. You will rest to-morrow and resume your journey the next night. On the fourth day you will reach Paris, and I will give you a letter which will explain to you what you will have to say to Monsieur Bernard's daughter."

Before his companion had time to reply, Jean had disappeared. Fortoto, overcome by emotion even more than by fatigue, sank upon the beach and fell into a state of utter prostration. He vainly tried to understand the situation and to collect his scattered thoughts. The more he reflected the more everything became confused. The incidents of the flight, Jean's promises, the image of Louise, all rose before him, and the thought of again beholding his affianced wife alone sustained him. He did not even continue trying to guess why his rescuer had brought him to this deserted shore, or ask himself how he would find help and advice amid the desolate rocks. He raised his head but once, thinking that he saw the high walls of some château on the summit of the cliff, but around him all was silent and dark. Jean had not even disturbed the shingle in his flight. He had vanished as

suddenly as though the rocks had opened to swallow him up. "Four days!" murmured Fortoto; "in four days I shall see Louise," and he again fell into a reverie.

Suddenly, however, he rose as though he had been struck by an electric battery. Jack of the Cliffs stood before him, grasping his arm as if about to break it. "Come!" he exclaimed, "come! he is dying!"

"Who is dying?" asked Fortoto.

"He! come! I tell you, come!" repeated Jean, still pulling at Fortoto's arm. The mulatto made no resistance and they speedily disappeared amid the shadows of the cliff.

XVII.

A WEEK after the escape of the two friends, one foggy evening in November, Jules Noridet was walking towards Montmartre. Since his return to Paris, M. de Mathis's nephew had done a great deal. By talking with the neighbours he had assured himself that nothing extraordinary had happened in the Rue Vanneau. The forge remained idle, but the lengthened absence of the workman who habitually toiled there had not been remarked. Noridet asked nothing about M. Ménager, in whom he was not interested, but he ascertained that no one in that part of Paris knew M. Lugos. His description of this mysterious man had not awakened any recollection in the mind of the customers of the café where Noridet had already spied upon him, and to which he had returned. He concluded that, the master and the servant being dead, the strange spot had been abandoned forever. If the box containing the compromising papers had remained under the anvil, it would be easy to abstract it, and thus one night Noridet ventured to make the attempt. He went through the same proceedings as his foster-brother, but found that the deposit had been removed.

This discovery quite enraged him. The crimes which he had committed one upon another in so short a time had become useless since the proofs of the first one, together with the will, still existed; however, Noridet resolved to recover and destroy these dangerous documents, cost what it might. Fortoto alone could have taken them away. The letter which he had written to break off the connection sufficiently proved that he had gone over to the enemy, and the telegrams which had preceded the letter might even signify premeditated treachery. It was Fortoto, then, whom Noridet must find, and he spared no pains in trying to do so. However, the ex-super of the *Fantaisies Comiques* had suddenly become invisible. His mother, the negress Aurora, had not seen him for many months, and after soundly abusing him, she told Noridet that he had not been prowling round that part of Paris for some time past. His disappearance coincided precisely with the date of his last telegram, and there was reason to believe that he had sedulously concealed himself since then.

Where was he hidden? Noridet did not hesitate to apply to the police for information on the subject; and as his social position was good, and as he was making inquiries about an ex-police agent dismissed for inattention, he obtained a promise that a search would be instituted. When five or six days had elapsed, he indeed received a report which set forth all that he already knew, to the effect that Fortoto had been a mountebank and a theatrical "super;" but as to where he now was, that was not known even to the police, though it was surmised that he must have left Paris.

Noridet felt perfectly sure of the contrary, for he was not aware that Fortoto had gone to Monville. On the morrow after his arrival in Paris, he had written to M. Brossin to tell him that he should remain absent for some little time, and he had received a reply which completely reassured him. The baron informed him of the disappearance and probable death of Count d'Alcamo, and added that two suspicious individuals had been arrested. He did not enter into particulars, but the purport of his letter was that the honourable M. Noridet had not been suspected for a single instant. Fully tranquillized on this point, the murderer now displayed great eagerness in trying to reach the only man who knew his secret.

By dint of reflection, Noridet was struck with the idea that if Fortoto showed himself anywhere it would be in the neighbourhood where his affianced wife resided. Noridet remembered the narrative of the mulatto's love affairs. He knew that he had not yet been received at the house of his betrothed, but that he often went to wait for her in the evening near the Château Rouge. Thus if Fortoto were still in Paris, it was almost certain that he might be found in that part of the city, and if, on the contrary, he had gone away, there was at least a chance of meeting the young girl. Feeling certain that M. Bernard had died upon being thrown out of the train, Noridet relied upon the body not being recognised, and concluded that Louise must still be waiting for her father. By accosting her adroitly in the street under pretence of asking for some information concerning Fortoto, he hoped to be able to strike up an acquaintance with her and win her confidence. He even made up his mind to call at her house if absolutely needful, still he wanted to avoid this on account of its proximity to Aurora's abode, and he preferred to trust to the chance of meeting her in the street.

That evening, then, he set out at dusk for Montmartre. He had calculated that at this time of day Louise must be going home after finishing her work, and that there was a chance of finding her alone, or, what was still better, with her lover. Certainly, had Noridet known that M. Bernard was still living, he would have adopted other plans, but as regards this victim of his hatred, he felt the utmost security. In proceeding from the Rue du Helder, where he resided, to the Chaussée-Clignancourt, where he hoped to find Louise, he intentionally chose the most frequented road, and reached the Faubourg Montmartre by the Rue Lafayette. Night was falling and a motley throng crowded the sidewalks. The shops glittered with light, and from the open doorways of smoky beer-houses and doubtful cafés there escaped gusts of warm air, conveying into the street the acrid odour of absinthe, and the sickening smell of beer. The lights of broughams and cabs flashed by like meteors. It was the hour when the army of common vice takes possession of its skirmishing ground, and Noridet, who cared only for gilded vice, hastened his steps, in order to get quickly out of this noisy, vulgar corner of modern Paris.

Just as he was crossing the street at the point where the Rue Drouot and the Rue Lafayette meet, he was stopped by a block of vehicles, and while waiting for an opportunity to pass, he gazed at the passers-by in the indifferent style of a wealthy man examining the common herd. At last, his eyes happened to light upon a woman, whom the block had brought near him—a woman of youthful aspect, with a charming figure; and the glimpse which he caught of her profile awoke some faint recollection in his mind. As soon as the crowd darted across the street, she ventured in her turn to leave the sidewalk, and Noridet, actuated by a faint feeling of

curiosity, began to follow her. Having crossed over, she turned the corner of the Faubourg Montmartre, and raised her head, as though looking for some sign or number. A street lamp at this moment fully lit up her face. Noridet stopped short, and could scarcely restrain a cry of satisfaction. He had just recognised Louise Bernard.

He could scarcely believe his eyes, and yet it was really she, Fortoto's flame, the steward's daughter, whom chance had brought in his way. He had never seen her but once, but, like all rakes, he had a good memory as regarded women's faces, and could not be mistaken. Now, what was Louise Bernard doing in this disreputable quarter at a time of day when she ought to have been going quietly home by the shortest route? Noridet asked himself this question, and to solve it, the best way was to follow the girl and see what she was looking for. Above her head hung a yellow lantern with the following inscription in large black letters: *MONT DE PIÉTÉ, Branch Office.*

The inscription was repeated on a brass plate beside an open entry, which seemed to invite borrowers to walk in. Louise entered the dark passage quickly, and Noridet, who was watching her closely, saw her stop at the foot of the staircase as though she hesitated to go up. After a short pause, however, she made up her mind to ascend, and did so in the hasty manner which indicates a sudden resolution and the fear of departing from it. Noridet at once realised the advantage which he might derive from this unexpected opportunity, and so he went in after the young girl.

It was not without repugnance, however, that he entered this pawn office. His father's death had made him rich early in life, and he had never set foot in such a place before. His pecuniary needs, even on the few occasions when he had been "hard up," had been of too important a character to be satisfied by pawning his watch like a poor student, or his silver like a tradesman who has to meet a note. However, he thought that he ran no risk of meeting any one whom he habitually saw in society, and so he boldly entered. Besides, to effect his purpose as regards Louise, he would have subjected himself to much greater annoyance than this. He therefore resolutely entered, and went up the stairs, meeting on his way some persons who were carrying bundles, and who paid no attention to him. They went up and down without even looking at each other. It seemed as though each and all were in a hurry to get through the disagreeable business.

Noridet presently came to a pair of folding doors near which there was still another portal, bearing, in black letters, the inviting inscription, "private entrance." There is an aristocracy even among borrowers. Noridet, who was not aware of this, wondered for an instant whether Louise had made use of this private entrance; however, the folding-doors, which were for general use, opened to admit a man carrying a clock, and Noridet then espied the young girl in the common room. He accordingly entered it. Louise had seated herself in a corner to await her turn, and evidently wished to avoid all eyes. She knew Noridet by name, but had never seen him, so she paid no attention to his arrival, which, indeed, nobody noticed. The room was full, sad and silent. A special gloom is always observable in places of the kind. This office, indeed, seemed as though it were the waiting-room of some hospital, and nothing was heard but the remarks of the clerks announcing the sums lent or refunded. The customers of the pawnoffice replied in a low voice, and the modesty of their misery would have touched even Noridet himself had he not been absorbed in contemplating Louise Bernard.

The young girl had lost her colour, and her eyes encircled with dark lines spoke of deep and recent grief. However, her paleness made the delicacy of her features and the pure oval of her face all the more apparent. Fortoto's affianced wife looked indeed charming, and Noridet, who had never been so near to her before, almost forgot his plans and purposes in his admiration of her simple grace and youthful beauty. She had evidently come there for a loan, for under her shawl she carried a little parcel, and she scarcely dared to look at those about her.

The borrowers crowded to a counter, some of them, like Louise, carrying small objects—and these were the better off of these needy people—and others bringing clothing, linen, and mattresses, all the last resources of the poor. The clerks took up the bundles, which they untied on the counter, and spread out. After a brief examination they accepted the contents or rejected them if they did not represent sufficient value. From time to time some woman who had come with the hope of obtaining some money to buy bread for her children went off with tears in her eyes. Moved and almost frightened by the sad sight which she now beheld for the first time, Louise did not hasten to approach the terrible counter, but one of the clerks did not fail to spy out this unknown customer's pretty face. "It is your turn, mademoiselle," said he, addressing the young girl with insinuating politeness.

Louise blushed, rose, and presented herself at the counter, silently holding out her parcel. Her hand trembled so much and her cheeks changed colour so often that the clerks began to look at her with an attention not devoid of suspicion. Noridet, who was observing this scene from the end of the room, saw that the parcel contained some silver of old-fashioned style. "Six spoons and six forks—a hundred and thirty francs," said a voice from the neighbouring room.

"Do you accept?" asked the clerk at the wicket. Louise nodded affirmatively. "Go to the office on your left, then."

She mechanically obeyed, and waited for her turn beside two old women, while another clerk turned over a large register and ran up totals. "What is your name?" said he, bluntly.

This question troubled the young girl, who stammered: "Louise Bernard."

"Your calling? Your address?" resumed the clerk, surprised at his customer's embarrassment.

"I am an artificial flower-maker," said Louise, "and I live at Montmartre—"

"At Montmartre! that is no answer at all," grumbled the clerk. "I ask you what street you live in, and what number. Besides you must have some papers."

"Papers!" repeated the young girl, who had turned very pale. "I did not know that it was necessary to have any."

"You ought to know," brutally replied the clerk, "and to teach you better, go and fetch them. You will receive your money when you bring them."

Louise turned away trembling, and the looks her neighbours gave her completed her dismay. The dialogue had been overheard, and some ironical remarks were already exchanged.

"A flower-maker with silver spoons and forks by the dozen, that's funny!" said one woman.

"And she don't know that she ought to have brought her papers! She

wants to make it thought that she has never been here before," said an old hag, who had formerly led a gay life.

The terrible word "thief" was even uttered and fell upon the ear of the unfortunate girl, who put her hand to her heart and was on the point of fainting. At this moment, a man with a grey moustache and a forbidding face stepped out of the crowd, took Louise by the arm, and said to her in a rough tone: "Come along with me."

"Good! She's arrested! She will have to pass the night at the police-station," said the spiteful old hag, while the officer led the young girl away, half dead with shame and terror.

Noridet had not lost a single detail of this scene, and he saw how he could turn it to account. He elbowed his way resolutely through the crowd which was gathering around Louise, and reached the landing. The poor child had just fainted away, and the door of the private office was being opened so that she might be placed beyond the reach of the stupid curiosity of the throng.

"Let me pass, if you please," said Noridet, with that air of authority which rarely fails to take effect with subordinates. His elegant attire and disdainful composure prevented any objections on the part of the officer, who let him into the office and shut the door in the face of the crowd.

While the clerks were seating Louise upon a sofa and throwing water in her face, Noridet addressed the man who appeared to be the manager. "Here is my card," said he, "and you can communicate my name to the Prefect of Police, whom I am acquainted with. The father of this young girl is in the employ of one of my friends, and I am ready to answer for her."

This interference was crowned with success. The head clerk had read about Noridet's inheritance in the papers, and was anxious to make himself agreeable to so rich and influential a gentleman. He explained what had taken place; the rules were severe, stolen property was often offered, and they were obliged, he said, to adopt very great precautions. Noridet listened with the air of a superior who is accepting an apology, and then announced that he would accompany Louise Bernard to her father's house. Suspecting that some love affair was afoot, the clerks smiled covertly, and the police-agent began to think that the case was not very serious. During this short dialogue the young girl had gradually revived.

"This gentleman answers for you, mademoiselle," said the head clerk, pointing to Noridet.

Louise looked at her unknown protector with astonishment and gratitude. While in her swoon she had not heard anything, and it seemed to her as though she were now waking from an evil dream. "You can return to-morrow with your papers," observed the clerk, who did not lose sight of business.

"Mademoiselle," said Noridet, in a tone full of feeling, "you have never seen me, but I know your father, and if you will allow me, I will go home with you." Surprise and hesitation were now to be read in the young girl's eyes. "I am a friend of Count d'Alcamo," added Noridet, in a low tone.

At this unexpected name Louise started, and her face expressed the liveliest pleasure. "Thank you, sir," said she, rising. "I will go with you."

"If any further information is necessary," resumed Noridet, in an off-hand manner, to the head clerk, "you have my address, and you can send

to my residence." Then, without waiting for an answer, he offered his arm to Louise and made ready to leave.

"Excuse me, sir," said the police officer, passing before them; "there is a crowd at the door of the office, and I will disperse it."

The precaution was a wise one, and the officer was allowed to do as he proposed. As soon as the stairs were free, Noridet went down with the young girl, and did not observe that they were being followed. Mistrustful by profession, the officer who had so obligingly made way for them now thought proper to follow them. Under any other circumstances, Noridet would have noticed this, but he was too busy to look behind him. Upon the conversation which he was about to have with Louise Bernard depended the success of his plans, to ensure which, he had to employ an amount of prudence and address such as few men possess.

Noridet knew that his name had not been heard by the young girl in the pawn office, and he wished to remain *incognito* while explaining his connection with Count d'Alcamo and his steward. He was obliged to invent a plausible story at once. His imagination was fertile enough in that respect, but the great difficulty consisted in obtaining, without compromising himself, the information he needed as regards Fortoto. If the latter, after betraying his foster-brother, had seen Louise, he must have told her everything, and so too direct a question would arouse her suspicions. Noridet knew perfectly well that on approaching this subject he would be treading on dangerous ground, and he resolved to trust to the chances of the conversation, which would last some time, if, as he believed, Mademoiselle Bernard meant to return to Montmartre. They had reached the street, and Noridet felt the young girl's arm tremble in his, for she had not yet recovered from her fright. He crossed over the way, and turned the corner of the Rue Lafayette. He meant to escort Louise home by way of the Rue Rochecouart, so as to have more time to talk to her, and she allowed herself to be led along, which seemed to him a good sign. "Mademoiselle," said he in a lively manner, "I owe you an explanation of my conduct."

"Oh, sir," murmured Louise, "it is I, on the contrary, who owe you my apologies and thanks."

"I don't accept them," replied Noridet, laughing. "We will settle the account with my old friend, Alcamo, whom I shall rate soundly for leaving the daughter of his faithful steward in trouble."

"Alas! sir," sighed the young girl, "the count has been absent for a fortnight, and my father—"

"Yes, yes! I know," interrupted Noridet, not wishing to speak of M. Bernard, "but I must tell you by what happy chance I have been able to do you a service. I have known you for a long time, to begin with, and without your being aware of it."

Fortoto's betrothed could not help looking askance at this stylish-looking young man whom she saw for the first time, and who professed to know her. "I saw you leaning on your father's arm one day when I was out walking with Alcamo, who pointed out his steward to me, saying that he thought a great deal of him, and remarking that you were charming, which, by the way, was not at all necessary, as I could see it for myself."

Louise blushed, and cast down her eyes.

"I must add," continued Noridet, "that I did not expect to be obliged to go into a pawnbroker's office to see you again. That is what comes of being charitable." The young girl looked at him in astonishment. "I will make a confession to you, mademoiselle," resumed Noridet, gaily.

"I will admit to you that I very often visit those ugly places to satisfy a mania of mine—that of obliging unfortunate people who are in need. I have some little fortune, and you cannot imagine how entertaining it is to do good. So I go to redeem the objects on which money has been lent to my poor people—for I have my own poor people—and in addition, I have often met persons there who were worthy of being helped. There is no great merit on my part."

"Oh, sir, how good you are!" said Louise, raising her large eyes, moist with tears, to Noridet's face.

The scamp saw that the moment had come for profiting by the young girl's emotion to win her confidence. "And now, mademoiselle, that I have told you my secrets," he resumed, in an almost fatherly manner, "you must tell me yours." However, as he felt Louise start, he hastened to add, smiling: "Oh, don't be afraid. I don't ask much, I only wish to know how I can be useful to you."

"Thank you, sir," said the young girl, "I am too grateful to you to refuse your advice."

"Speak, then, my dear child," said Noridet, affectionately, "and I promise you that you will not regret having had recourse to me."

There was a moment's silence. Louise made no haste to reply, and her insidious protector became uneasy. He had thought that he would elicit what he so anxiously wished to know, for it seemed to him impossible that Fortoto's name should not crop up in the young girl's confession; however, Mademoiselle Bernard, instead of speaking, made haste to walk on, as though she were anxious to reach some appointed spot, and for the first time she looked about her to see which way they were going. Noridet, who observed this, began to feel anxious at her change of manner. "Come, mademoiselle," said he, endeavouring to hide his anxiety, "what do you wish to ask me?"

"Well," answered the young girl, "I should like to know one thing, which you alone perhaps can tell me. Where is Count d'Alcamo now?"

At this unforeseen question, which recalled one of his crimes, Noridet turned lividly pale, and thought for an instant that Louise had guessed his terrible secret. But the eyes of the steward's daughter were so pure and limpid, their gaze so frank, that the murderer regained courage at once. "I believe," said he, with an air of indifference, "that the count is at the Château de Monville, as the guest of Baron Brossin."

"I have been waiting for eleven days for the return of a messenger whom I sent to him."

They had now reached the corner of the Rue Rochechouart, and Noridet was about to turn into it when the young girl said to him, in a voice full of emotion: "Will you be kind enough to take me to Montholon Square, where some one is waiting for me?"

"It must be Fortoto!" thought Noridet. "I am decidedly in luck."

"Come, you shall know everything," added Louise, in an excited tone.

"I am at your orders, mademoiselle," replied M. de Mathis's nephew, trembling with impatience.

Night had come, and the square was about to be closed. The few promenaders were hastening towards the exit; but on a bench, just in front of the Rue Lafayette, a man was seated, and remained strangely still. He was bending over, leaning upon a cane. He was evidently either very old or else an invalid. Louise went straight towards him, dragging her protector after her, and Noridet was surprised to see that this man was

not Fortoto. Indeed at the sound of their footsteps the old man raised his head, and the light fell full in his face.

"He!" exclaimed Noridet, recoiling, as though he had seen a spectre.

The scamp had just recognised M. Bernard, and could not believe his senses. By what miracle had the man whom he had thrown out of a train going at full speed failed to be killed? The dead do not return, and the steward ought to have died from the grasp at his throat before even he was thrown upon the line. "He will recognise me; I am lost!" thought Noridet, whose first thought was of flight.

"Here is my father, sir," said the young girl. "You now see why I wish to know where Count d'Alcarno is to be found."

Louise had not dropped her new protector's arm, but had dragged him in spite of some resistance to the bench where M. Bernard was seated. It was too late to draw back. Noridet realised all the danger of the situation. It was his rule, however, to face peril, and he preferred to know at once all that he had to fear. The path was dark and deserted, and the scene, however violent it might be, would have no witnesses. At the sound of his daughter's voice the steward raised his head, and looked at her with so strange an expression that Noridet at once remarked it. M. Bernard seemed to be ten years older. His hair had turned white, his cheeks were hollow, and his dull eyes stared vaguely. Life still lingered in his shattered frame; but intelligence had departed. "This is what they have made of my father!" exclaimed Louise, in a clear voice.

"In Heaven's name, mademoiselle, what has happened to Monsieur Bernard," hypocritically asked Noridet, who was already regaining courage.

"He went away with his employer," answered the young girl, "but I had a presentiment of misfortune; for, on the evening of his departure he spoke of pitiless enemies, of terrible danger. One night he returned in an apparently dying condition. He had been picked up, covered with blood and badly wounded, on the Dieppe railway line."

"What a horrible accident!" exclaimed Noridet, audaciously.

The young girl sadly shook her head, and proceeded in so low a tone that she seemed to be talking to herself: "For three days and three nights he was in delirium, and I thought at each moment that he would expire in my arms. But Heaven preserved him. However, there was still another grief in store for me—"

"What was that, mademoiselle?"

"On the fourth day his wounds began to heal, but he had lost his mind," said Louise, bursting into tears.

If the steward's daughter had detected the flash of joy in Noridet's eyes, she might have had some inkling as to the terrible plot which was being woven about her.

"It is impossible!" cried the murderer; "men do not become insane all at once. It is merely the effect of the shock to the brain, which the fall caused, and this effect will be transient."

"Alas! I should be glad to believe that, sir, but the physician said that my poor father's condition would probably never change."

This was precisely what Noridet had wanted to find out. His face now assumed an expression of sincere pity.

"It seems," continued Louise, "that quiet madness is almost incurable, and my father is always as quiet as you see him now."

"But why, then, do you think that his mind has left him?" said Noridet, with well-assumed simplicity.

"He does not remember anything; he has even forgotten the name of his employer whom he was so fond of, even my name, too," said the young girl, sobbing.

"I see that he does not recognise me," Noridet boldly ventured to say, "although he has often seen me with Alcamo."

"He has forgotten everything," said Louise, "and yet he mutters strange words at times. He talks of murder, and struggles, as though with an assassin. One would imagine that the recollection of some terrible event rose up before his mind."

"Probably the accident on the railway line," hastily replied Noridet, "but, in spite of the doctor's opinion, I persist in believing that a salutary crisis will some day take place, and then—"

"The doctor," interrupted Louise, "said that a sudden and violent emotion might, perhaps, revive his intelligence, but I no longer hope."

Noridet had turned pale. What more violent emotion could M. Bernard be exposed to than the sight of his murderer? However, the steward continued staring with dull, expressionless eyes. The danger was over, and Noridet was beginning to see the possibility of turning the new situation of affairs to good account. The father mad, and the daughter bound to him by gratitude, were no longer either of them to be feared, and, with a little skill, it would be easy to reach Fortoto. Noridet's new purpose was to win the confidence of Louise by delicate attentions, to conceal his name, which might awaken her suspicions, to avoid meeting her with Fortoto, and to act separately against the mulatto who no doubt detained the papers, as soon as he could find him. "Mademoiselle," said he, in the most winning manner, "I share your sorrows with my whole heart, and I beg of you to make use of me. The daughter of Monsieur Bernard, the faithful steward of my friend Alcamo, must not be obliged to return where a fortunate chance brought me in her way."

At this allusion to the pawn-office, Louise could not help blushing.

"Thank you, sir," she stammered. "The count will come to our aid, and I am sure that, thanks to him, my poor father will not need anything."

Noridet knew what to think of any such hope being realised, and he reflected with ferocious delight that poverty would soon place M. Bernard and his daughter at his mercy. He was not mistaken, for Louise was already in the greatest straits. After the accident, only a small sum was found on her father's person, and Fortoto's affianced had been obliged to have recourse to her own small savings, which the expenses of the illness had soon exhausted. She had always lived very well for a mere work-girl; for her father, while he expected that she should work at her flower-making, did not allow her to want for anything, and in fact he was always willing to gratify her girlish fancies. Although she felt certain that her father owned a comfortable competency, due to Count d'Alcamo's liberality, she was utterly ignorant as to where his money was invested. The count alone could have told her, and he was not there, whilst Fortoto, whom she had despatched to Monville, did not return. Poverty had soon come, Louise had been obliged for the first time in her life to have recourse to the pawnshop, and her heart failed her as she thought that the time would soon come when she would be obliged to leave her father to himself all day, in order to work for his needs. Almost invariably, misfortune softens one, and Louise, who in happier times would have been on her guard against

the suspicious overtures of a stranger, now gave way unreservedly to her gratitude. It already seemed to her that she was not alone in the world since a new friend protected her, and Noridet guessed only too well how she felt.

"Mademoiselle," said he, with gay cordiality, "I have no right to deprive my friend Alcamo of the pleasure of obliging you, but he is absent, and I ask you to allow me to take his place. Allow me to see you home this evening with your father; to-morrow I will take steps for providing him with all that he requires."

"Thank you, sir; I accept," said Louise, with tears in her eyes.

M. Bernard had risen when he saw his daughter approaching him, and had taken her arm. Paternal instinct had survived intelligence. They left the square to return to Montmartre. Louise helped her father to walk with the skill and care which are the special gifts of woman. Noridet placed himself beside her. Hardened as he was to all emotion, he could not bear touching the man whom he had tried to kill, and in spite of himself he avoided meeting his eyes. Besides, from calculation as much as from the necessity of calming himself, he dropped the conversation as it might have led him further than he wished to go at this first interview.

Thus they silently ascended the long Rue Rochechouart. It was the time of day when the workmen, who, by hundreds, toil at Godillot's vast manufactory of uniforms and military equipments, proceed homeward, so a noisy crowd covered the sidewalks. This human tide had to be steered through, and Noridet had great trouble in protecting the father and daughter from unintentional jostling. On reaching the Avenue Trudaine the crowd became so dense that Louise showed some uneasiness, and Noridet was about to take her under a carriage-way and then procure a cab, when a sudden crush pushed them into the middle of the street. The crowd had opened to leave the field free for two workmen who were fiercely fighting together. The young girl was now very frightened, and Noridet had barely time to throw himself before her to protect her. Almost immediately, one of the combatants, driven back by a fierce blow, staggered and almost fell upon Louise, whereupon, Noridet caught him by the throat and shook him vigorously. The by-standers, who approved of his intervention on behalf of a young girl and an old man, were about to help him when a strange scene took place. M. Bernard had suddenly risen to his full height, his dim eyes had begun to blaze, and he followed the movements of the combatants with strange attention. It seemed as though memory had returned to him at this sight, and that light was gradually dawning upon his darkened mind. When Noridet closed with the workman and grasped his throat, the steward uttered a loud cry, tore himself from his daughter, and threw himself upon Noridet. "Assassin! poisoner!" he howled: "Here is the man who poisoned his uncle! Here is the man who tried to murder me!"

Assassin—poisoner—such words as these always cause crowds to gather, and among the people who surrounded the actors in this strange scene, while some only paid attention to Noridet's generous conduct in protecting a woman against a drunkard, and tried to free him from M. Bernard, others—and these were the more numerous—thought that the old man's words were serious, although applied to a well-dressed person. The fellow in the blouse had profited by this diversion to renew his fight with his first adversary, and at some distance off; but Noridet, the steward, and his daughter, had become the centre of a growing crowd.

"Father ! father ! I beg of you—" began Louise, in a half-stifled voice.

"Let me alone, my child," said M. Bernard, still holding his enemy. "Here is the wretch who tried to kill me."

Noridet had no trouble in defending himself against an exhausted man. He caught the steward by the wrists and held him off, but he had turned lividly pale, and his hair literally stood up on his head. It was the second time in his life that he experienced that superstitious terror which freezes the blood and paralyzes the strength. The name of Aurora articulated beside an open grave, had prostrated him on the day of his uncle's burial. And the old steward, who now threw his latest crime in his teeth, once more pierced that protecting armour in which skilful scoundrels are always clad.

"Your father carries his madness too far," said Noridet, at last, in an angry voice to the young girl.

"No, no !" howled the crowd, which was becoming hostile, "the old fellow is right ! Take the dandy to the police station !"

Recalled to himself by the insults which rained upon him from all sides, Noridet relaxed his hold on the old man, and strode towards the foremost of the spectators with such an air of resolution that the first row recoiled. He now relied for safety upon immediate flight. No one knew him in the crowd, which was less aggressive than noisy. Louise, herself, was not aware of his name. By bursting through the throng, and darting along the streets, he might escape from the dangerous consequences of this adventure. He resolved, at all events, to make the attempt. The young girl, occupied in quieting her father, thought but little about her chance protector, and the public drew back, as it always does, before the bold man who advances with his head high and his fists clinched. Noridet was about to cross this human barrier without resistance, when a stir took place among those around him. Two policemen had made their way into the crowd by using their elbows, and behind them glided a personage whom Noridet recognised at once. It was the police agent who had arrested Louise at the pawnshop, and who had seen fit to follow her out of professional zeal.

Noridet at once realised that he must change his mode of proceeding, so he went straight up to the representatives of the law. "Be good enough to put a stop to this scandalous scene," said he, with great coolness ; "Mademoiselle will explain to you that her father has lost his reason, and I beg you to help me to take him home."

"No, no ! I am not a madman," cried M. Bernard, gesticulating furiously, "and I will prove that this man is a murderer !"

"Sir," said one of the policemen, in a low tone, to Noridet, "the old fellow seems to be on the way to Charenton, but there has been too much of a stir, and we shall be obliged to go before the commissary ; however, it won't take long, and all you will have to do will be to give your name and address."

"Come, gentlemen, move on if you please," said the other police agent, taking hold of M. Bernard, who offered no resistance. Louise, pale and trembling, placed herself near her father, and Noridet followed them, without the slightest sign of emotion. His scornful calmness soon convinced the crowd of his innocence, and the lookers-on slowly dispersed. They had relied upon some such moving spectacle as the arrest of a great criminal, and the matter seemed reduced to the removal of a poor maniac to a safe place. The lovers of street dramas went away like the habitual frequenters of a theatre, who turn their backs when they find no new play announced.

on the bill. There was, however, a small escort of rowdies on the way to the commissary's office, around which there collected anucleus of obstinately curious people.

M. Bernard had very suddenly become quiet. He did not shout any more, he did not abuse his enemy, but he darted at him looks of hatred. From time to time he pressed his daughter's hand, and his eyes rested tenderly upon her. He had drawn himself up to his full height, his brow was clear, and his serious expression seemed to indicate: "I am no longer mad, and I shall revenge myself."

This change had greatly startled Noridet. As long as the scene had been going on amid an indifferent mob the danger had not been very great; but, before the commissary, the matter might assume a different aspect, and M. Bernard's transfiguration was an alarming symptom. The murderer summoned all his courage and prepared to play a cunning part, relying more than ever upon being able to entrench himself in his position as a rich and respectable man, as though that had been an impregnable fortress. They went in. One of the police agents—it was the one who had followed them in plain clothes—entered the commissary's private room to explain the scene which had occurred in the pawn-office, preceding the one in the street. An officer remained with M. Bernard, his daughter, and Noridet, who walked about with his hat on his head, looking at the steward with somewhat contemptuous pity. Louise saw nothing of what was going on around her, so busy was she in watching her father and trying to discern some proof of his return to reason. M. Bernard, still silent and calm, was first summoned, and went alone into the magistrate's office. This system of separate examination was not to Noridet's taste, and indeed, it troubled him greatly. He would have preferred a confrontation, in which his bearing and language would have shown his superiority over his adversary. "You will confess, mademoiselle," said he, with some bitterness, "that I could not expect this disagreeable turn of affairs, and that your father is making a poor return for the service which I rendered you."

"Oh, sir," replied Louise, in a voice full of grief, "my poor father has not yet fully recovered his reason, but I hope that this crisis will prove salutary, and I am sure that he will join me later on in thanking you."

"Oh! believe me," replied Noridet, eagerly, "what has just taken place will not at all prevent me from helping you to the utmost of my power."

The scamp had too much interest in securing the favourable testimony of Mademoiselle Bernard, not to profit by this tête-à-tête, and he made many protestations of devotion and offers of service. Louise listened to him with but little attention, however, for her thoughts were with her father; still it was easy to see that she did not mistrust her new friend. Besides, Noridet had plenty of time to display all his cunning and address, for the examination of M. Bernard lasted more than an hour. As the time slipped away the guilty man's anxiety increased. When a commissary believes a man to be insane he does not amuse himself with making him talk for a long time, and this interminable interview with the steward, did not pre-
sage anything favourable. Noridet did not hide from himself, that if M. Bernard had indeed recovered his mind, facts would prevail over denials. The steward knew the secret of M. de Mathis's death, and if he also knew where the box belonging to Count d'Alcamo now was, he could fairly crush the culprit. Never had this scoundrel, who had three times deserved the scaffold, seen himself so near to ruin, still, he bore himself erect, and continued talking quietly with the daughter of his last victim. At the same

moment, however, he was reflecting that his fate was perhaps being decided in the inner office, from which a mere partition separated him, and that presently on crossing the threshold he might meet justice and punishment.

"The commissary is waiting for you, sir," suddenly said a police-officer, opening the door.

Noridet had composed his face for the occasion, and had assumed a tone and bearing suited to the circumstances. He no longer had to brow-beat a crowd, and conquer a few working-people. He had to explain himself before a magistrate, mistrustful by profession. An excess of boldness would have prejudiced the commissary against him, and an excess of humility would have put him upon his guard. Noridet knew how to find the medium. None but the innocent ever spoil their cause; the guilty emerge scot-free from the most trying positions, when they are as cunning as Noridet.

He went in, bowed with polite dignity, and seated himself, at a gesture from the commissary, who was occupied in taking some notes with a pencil. M. Bernard was no longer in the office. He had, probably, been conducted into another room and would be summoned if necessary; and Noridet, who had expected to see him, could barely hide his surprise. "Sir," said he quietly to the commissary, "I do not find fault with the necessity which has obliged your agents to bring me here, and I am ready to answer any questions which you may ask of me, but I ask your permission to acquaint you with my name and social position."

"I am perfectly well acquainted with them," replied the magistrate with marked coldness, "and until I have proof to the contrary, I consider them very honourable."

Under any other circumstances Noridet would have taken exception to the conditional terms of this statement, but this was not the time for him to show himself over exacting. "Since I am not under the necessity of introducing myself," he resumed with perfect ease, "if you will allow me, I will at once explain the singular series of chances which led to my being the cause of a mob gathering in the street."

"That is not necessary," replied the commissary with the same calmness, "the agent who was on duty at the pawn-office has told me what took place there, and the scene in the Rue Rochechouart has also been related to me in all its details."

Noridet, in spite of his well assumed impassibility, felt nettled by these cold and curt replies. To use a slang expression, it was as if the commissary "spoilt all his good points." "You are so well informed, sir," now said Noridet, with a touch of haughtiness, "that I seemingly have nothing to tell you. Allow me, therefore, to wait till you question me."

During the short spell of silence which followed upon this answer, Noridet observed that the commissary was examining him with that penetrating attention which is like a weapon with magistrates. He was already on the defensive, however, and his face, although he stood in the full light, did not betray aught of the trouble in his mind. He had assumed a mask of indifference on entering the room, and he preserved it under the formidable eye of his judge.

"You are aware," suddenly said the commissary, "that the man who was brought here declares that you attempted to murder him."

"Yes, I heard the unfortunate man call me an assassin and a poisoner, but I attached very little importance to the words of a poor maniac, and I

confess that I did not expect to be called upon to justify myself as regards such accusations."

"This man, this madman, if you prefer it, expresses himself, I must say, with remarkable clearness, and his story appears to me to be perfectly plausible."

"Indeed! and what may it be?" asked Noridet, with an air of simple-minded curiosity which would have made the fortune of an actor.

"He was picked up in a dying condition on the railway-line, half way between here and Rouen, and he said that you threw him out of a compartment in which he was travelling alone with you."

"Excuse me, sir," said Noridet, quietly; "I think it useless to bring forward all the many arguments by which I might justify myself. One will suffice. You are a man of the world, and you will easily understand that I should not have travelled on my return from Dieppe in the same compartment as the man-servant of one of my friends."

"You have been travelling recently on that line, then?" said the commissary, without replying to this objection.

"I have no reason to deny it, and I will add that I should certainly have seen this man Bernard had he travelled by the same train as myself."

"You know him very well, then?"

"As well as I should be likely to know a servant. He has for a long time been in the service of Count d'Alcamo, whom I often see, and I have frequently met him at his master's house."

The magistrate began to turn over the notes scattered about his table, as if he were looking for a memorandum.

"Do you know," said he, after a rather long search among his papers, "where the rich foreigner, whose name you have just mentioned, can be found?"

Noridet made a gesture of regret, and assumed a sad look as he replied: "I don't know, sir, and for a very sad reason, Count d'Alcamo has disappeared since I left the Château of Mouville, where we were both visiting, and our entertainer, Baron Brossin, wrote to me that he had probably been the victim of some crime or accident."

"Of a crime," said the commissary: "I have received information about this affair from the public prosecutor, who is actively searching for the culprit, and I did not expect to learn by a mere chance to-day that the steward had nearly been murdered like his master—perhaps on the same day."

"It is, indeed, a strange coincidence," muttered Noridet, as though talking to himself. The magistrate did not take his eyes off him, and tried to read his thoughts. "If it were"—continued the rascal, talking under his breath. "But no, it is impossible—impossible. Alcamo thought very highly of Bernard—he told me a score of times that he was the best and most faithful of stewards."

"Be kind enough to explain yourself more clearly," said the commissary, who thought that some discovery was near at hand.

"I have nothing to say, sir," hastily rejoined Noridet, "Heaven forbid that I should accuse any one. Coincidences are not proofs. I have even at this moment personal reasons for knowing that," he added, with a smile.

The magistrate seemed to reflect. The diabolical plot which had just occurred to Noridet was already bearing its fruits. His suspicions as to M. Bernard had been expressed with such skilfully calculated reserve that

they had struck the commissary. "And besides," resumed Noridet, with a sigh of relief, "Bernard, at the moment when the crime was committed—if indeed there has been any crime—was still at Monville, and he must have spoken to you about his master's death."

"No, no," said the magistrate, visibly preoccupied, "he told me nothing of it, and I believe that he left the château on the day of the event."

"That is very strange, and really—" Noridet suddenly stopped short as though he regretted having suffered a thoughtless exclamation to escape him, but he added, a moment later: "However, it is quite natural that the poor fellow doesn't remember anything, since he became deranged after his fall from the train."

"He says that he has never been deranged, and, indeed, during an hour's questioning just now, he appeared perfectly rational and very precise in his accusations."

"Excuse me, sir," said Noridet, coldly, seeing the commissary's suspicions again returning to himself, "but I should like to know if this precision of his went so far as to point out a motive which led to my committing this pretended crime? When a man is wealthy and respected, he does not murder a servant without having a very serious reason for wishing to get rid of him, and it seems to me difficult for Monsieur Bernard to have assigned any motive for an act, so unheard of in the society in which I move."

"You are mistaken, sir," said the commissary, gravely; "he explained to me the motive, which actuated you."

"We have come to the point at last," thought Noridet, who saw that the difficult moment had now arrived. If the steward had revealed his master's secrets, the entire plot would be unfolded, and it would be almost impossible for Noridet to struggle on. Nevertheless, he still had strength enough to put a good face on the matter. "I am waiting for this explanation, sir," he said, without apparent emotion.

"Pierre Bernard will give it to you himself," said the commissary, ringing a hand-bell.

Noridet felt, once more, as though his blood were freezing in his veins. He was about to be confronted with his victim. The time for captious arguments and perfidious slander was past. It was now necessary to struggle face to face with the only man who had the right to say to him at every word: "You lie!" From this terrible interview Noridet might come forth apparently immaculate and free to return home, or he might be taken to Mazas. The alternative was a terrible one. He hardened himself against all emotion, and waited without turning pale. A small door opened at the rear of the office, and M. Bernard came in, led by an officer. The change which had again taken place in him was very striking. Fever no longer lit up his eyes or coloured his face, and instead of standing upright under the influence of nervous excitement, he again seemed oppressed, and his movements had once more become automatic. His fit of anger had passed away. It had no doubt given way to calmness and composure. Noridet began to fear that he might have to struggle with an adversary too strong for him. At the moment when M. Bernard, as he seated himself, gave him a look as cold as steel, he thought that he was lost indeed. Nevertheless, he did not stir or speak. He had the strength to await his fate calmly. The commissary made a sign to the officer to retire, and, after again consulting the notes spread upon his desk, he took up a position in his arm-chair, that of a man prepared to question. The scene was

almost a solemn one. Noridet, who had not lost his clearness of mind, asked himself whether the magistrate would address him first, but he hoped that his enemy would be questioned beforehand. It was easier to parry attacks, than to make affirmations which M. Bernard could at every moment contradict.

"Do you recognise this gentleman?" at last said the commissary to the steward, pointing as he spoke at Noridet.

"Yes," said Bernard, in a hoarse voice.

"You understand, I think, without its being necessary for me to dwell upon the matter, how serious are the charges which you brought against him a few moments ago." M. Bernard did not reply, and the magistrate, who took his silence for assent, gravely continued: "Do you persist in declaring that Monsieur Jules Noridet attempted to murder you in the train from Dieppe."

Louise's father, who had started perceptibly at the sound of Noridet's name, remained for some seconds without speaking, and then said, in a low tone: "Yes, yes, it is he."

The commissary looked at Noridet, who slightly shrugged his shoulders, as if to say that the time had not come to defend himself. In fact, at the steward's first word he had been greatly struck by his air of indifference, and the briefness of his reply. Was it the calmness of strength? Was it on the contrary the sudden collapse of intelligence? Noridet watched with lively curiosity the slightest movements of his enemy's pale features, but he learnt nothing definite from them. "Here," resumed the magistrate, drily, "affirmations are not enough. You must repeat to me, before this gentleman, the narrative which you gave me when we were alone."

M. Bernard did not appear to hear, but he did not cease looking at Noridet with strange persistence. "I am waiting till it pleases you to speak," resumed the magistrate, in a tone in which some little irritation was apparent. The steward's silence was indeed becoming more and more incomprehensible. "Must I help your memory?" said the commissary, greatly surprised by this obstinacy. "Did you, or did you not speak to me about Count d'Aleamo, your master, of a secret between him and Monsieur Noridet. Did you tell me—"

"The secret!" interrupted M. Bernard, who seemed suddenly to awake; "the secret of that scoundrel. Ah! I know it, and I will tell it to you." Fire had returned to his eyes, the blood to his face, and his whole body again shook with the tremor of strong emotion. Noridet could not help turning pale.

"Speak!" said the magistrate, quickly. The steward had half risen, and the terrible revelation seemed to hang upon his lips. "Well, what stops you?" resumed the commissary, impatiently. "Will you explain yourself, and tell me what interest Monsieur Noridet had in wishing to kill you, and what mystery there is between him and your master?"

"It is the will," said Pierre Bernard, with singular rapidity; "his uncle's will—Monsieur de Mathis, who died—by poison—there is Made-moiselle—the count's daughter—and then I left Monville, and I got into the train—because I was ordered to follow him—and then—"

He stopped, and perfect silence ensued. "And then?" asked the magistrate.

The steward passed his hand over his brow, as though to brush away some cloud that had risen before his mind; his features became contracted, and his wild eyes glanced despairingly around him. "Ah! I have forgotten!" he exclaimed in despair. And he fell back exhausted.

Noridet breathed once more. He was beginning to understand.

The light which had dawned upon M. Bernard's brain was dying out ; little by little night fell again upon his weakened intelligence. Calm and silence had been fatal to this poor deranged fellow, whom the violent scene in the street had roused for a brief space of time. "Come, my friend," said the commissary, with compassionate mildness, "calm yourself, try to remember. You have nothing to fear here. I am quite ready to listen to you, and to do you justice."

Bernard turned upon him his eyes full of heart-rending grief. It was easy to see that behind his pale contracted forehead a terrible struggle was going on. It was the last struggle of the mind against madness slowly submerging it. His vacillating reason still sought for a point of support amid the chaos of recollection, like a shipwrecked man catches at the projecting points of a rock ; however, the tide of insanity kept on rising. "No, no, I cannot," at last murmured Bernard, convulsively moving his arms. This effort was his last. His head sunk upon his breast, his inert figure bent over, his eyes remained fixed and dull. It was all over. Nothing remained but a madman incapable of giving an intelligible reply, and still more incapable of bringing forward or sustaining a serious charge. The murderer was saved. If the commissary had been less engrossed by the sad and singular sight of this mental collapse, he could easily have divined by Noridet's face what were the feelings which agitated him. But 'twas only a passing revelation, Jules was too resolute not to regain command over his countenance. "Will you permit me, sir," said the hypocritical knave, "to ask this unfortunate man a few questions ? He has known me for a long time, and perhaps my voice will reach him better."

"Do so, sir," said the magistrate, favourably impressed by this unexpected offer.

"Bernard," said Noridet, in the most affectionate tone, "I speak to you in the name of my friend, Count d'Alcamo, your master, whom you were so fond of."

"Yes, I love him," stammered the steward.

"Well, you must know that he is dead ; yes, Count d'Alcamo ?" said Noridet, suddenly raising his voice.

"Dead ! he !" cried M. Bernard in a state of agitation. "It isn't true. I saw him at Monville on the night when I tried—"

"Finish what you were about to say," said the commissary, much impressed by this scene. But Bernard had relapsed into his stupor and remained silent.

"He is dead," continued Noridet, who seemed to work himself up little by little, "he has been murdered, and we are looking for his murderers."

The steward uttered a sigh, which was like a groan, but he did not answer. A somewhat lengthy silence followed upon this singular scene. The commissary already regretted having so severely questioned an honourable man. Pierre Bernard was, beyond a doubt, mad, and such being the case his accusations fell of themselves ; still this madness seemed to be attached by mysterious links to a crime concerning which the Paris police had as yet but very slight information. Strange doubts rapidly filled the magistrate's brain. The suspicions which Noridet had already expressed at the beginning of his interrogatory, and which he had confirmed by his astute questions, turned more and more against M. Bernard. It might be, indeed, that the steward had taken flight after killing his master, and his fall from the train could be easily understood if there had been an accident, or if he

had attempted to commit suicide. In presence of all this obscurity the commissary resolved to obtain additional information as to the crime at Monville, and to place the insane man in a safe place in the meantime.

As for Noridet, he thought fit to express his regret for the mistake which had been made. "Well, sir," said he politely, "my mind is now made up, so far as you yourself are concerned in this affair. An exceptional concurrence of circumstances obliged me to keep you here. This intermittent madness is so strange that I was deceived by it, and—"

"Believe me, sir," interrupted Noridet, "I perfectly understand all your motives, and I do not regret the chance which has made me acquainted with you. But I feel the most lively interest in this unhappy man. Will you, therefore, allow me to ask you what you have decided as regards him."

"I am going to send him to the prefecture in order that the physicians there may examine him. This is a measure which I must take for many reasons, and besides, it is entirely in his own interest. He will then be placed, if there be need of it, in a lunatic asylum."

"Thank you, sir," said Noridet, with a show of emotion; "as soon as this is done I should be grateful to you if you will let me know, so that I may make the poor man's situation pleasanter. It is a duty which I shall fulfil with all my heart, in memory of my friend who was very fond of him."

"These feelings honour you, sir, and I will willingly help you in your kind work."

"And now, sir," rejoined Noridet, "I have a last request to make of you. I wish to inform Mademoiselle Bernard in person of the decision which will deprive her of her father, and prepare her for the separation."

"That is quite natural," said the commissary, who appeared struck by this idea. "This young girl will be quite alone in the world, and she will need some one to help her, and watch over her."

"I will attend to that, sir," rejoined Noridet, and he rose up to take his leave.

XVIII.

ON the morrow of this warm encounter, Noridet awoke satisfied with himself, and confident in the future. It was the first time for two months that he felt the full delight of a man who sees a long-planned undertaking, carried on with difficulty, at last approach the goal of success. The road was being cleared before him, obstacles disappeared one by one—M. Lugos was dead; Pierre Bernard was insane! Fortoto remained; but, although Noridet had not yet discovered the whereabouts of Aurora's son, he thought himself on his track. Louise now had no other protector than the false friend who pretended to devote himself to her interests, and he hoped to wrest her last secret from her. Noridet was a thorough master in all the arts to which he must resort to attain his aims, and, on the previous evening, when leaving the commissary's office, he had played his part admirably well. The young girl, on learning that her father was to be taken away from her, went into hysterics. Noridet showed her the utmost attention, however, with an earnestness which the commissary in all good faith admired. He consoled her so kindly that he succeeded in inducing her to look upon the magistrate's decision as a measure adopted in M. Bernard's

interest. He, besides, carried his attentions so far as to escort her home, and even prevailed on the doorkeeper's wife to nurse her during the night.

Greatly disturbed by the emotion through which she had passed, Louise had naturally attached herself to the only person who appeared to be interested in her misfortunes. So, of her own accord, she invited Noridet to call on her again, as soon as possible. Like all young girls whom their position obliges to go out alone, Louise Bernard had early acquired that Parisian experience which is not dangerous to upright natures. As virtuous at heart and as chaste in conduct as the most carefully trained young ladies, she perfectly well knew all the consequences of a fault, and her rectitude had always kept her from yielding to commonplace, or, indeed, to any temptation. She was, besides, sincerely attached to Fortoto, and carefully avoided giving him the slightest cause for jealousy. Excepting her father, no one had ever entered her home, and in the street she knew how to make herself respected.

However, from a strange fatality, arising from the singular occurrences of the previous evening, Noridet was the only man who did not cause her to feel either fear or mistrust. He had seemed so good, so frank, so kind, that she really believed in his friendship for Count d'Alcamo, and could not imagine that his motives were bad. She awaited him on the morrow as she would have awaited a father, to open her heart to him, tell him her sorrows, her hopes, and ask his advice. As to one point she was not in fault. Her grace, beauty, and youth had failed to make any impression upon Noridet; in the hardened heart of this man of twenty-seven, there was no room for love. He had every interest in remaining the friend of Fortoto's affianced, and to do this, he must respect her. So it was without any thought of making a conquest that he repaired on the morrow to Montmartre.

He had spent the morning in writing two letters, first to the prefecture of police, to recommend M. Bernard to the special attention of the officials, as he greatly desired to appear in the light of the steward's recognised protector, and then to M. Brossin, in order to obtain definite information as to what was going on at the château. He had, as yet, merely received the vaguest intelligence, and that immediately after Alcamo's disappearance, and he now wished to know how the land lay before he began to build upon it. He was especially desirous of knowing the names of the persons who had been arrested, and the course which the proceedings against them had taken. His precautions once taken in this respect, Noridet made ready to visit Louise Bernard. The first point was to show that he possessed a high social position which would, in the young girl's eyes, account for his relations with Alcamo. There had been no time for this the evening before. By a chance favourable to his plans, Louise had not even heard his name mentioned, and had not thought of asking it. He was, therefore, at liberty to assume any name he chose, and to make up any story he pleased. He had other facilities besides. As Mademoiselle Bernard had not been present at the interrogatory, she was still ignorant of Alcamo's death, and that any suspicion rested upon her father. These serious tidings Noridet kept in reserve, just as clever writers of plays keep their best situations for the finish.

This time, in order to avert unlucky meetings, he went to Montmartre in a cab. On the evening before, he had proceeded on foot in order to turn to account any chance-meeting with Louise in the street. Now that he was sure of being received by her, however, he preferred to go *incognito*. He

took care to dress himself for the occasion with elegant simplicity. He had already made friends with the doorkeeper's wife, and was therefore admitted without any trouble. The woman informed him that Louise was better, and inquired after M. Bernard. "I knew very well that the poor man would never get over it," said he, when she heard that her lodger's father would soon enter an asylum. "You will see that he will die of it, my dear sir, just like my first husband, who became deranged, and did not last three months."

The doorkeeper's wife still talked on till Noridet was half way up the stairs, not, however, without having heard this prophecy with lively satisfaction. On a narrow door he found this inscription traced on a slip of cardboard: "Mademoiselle Louise Bernard, Artificial Flower-maker." As soon as he rang the young girl opened the door. "Good day, mademoiselle," said Jules, cordially shaking hands with her.

Louise thanked him for having come, and took him into the front room, looking out upon the terrace on which, from Aurora's window above, he had first seen her. Noridet did not wish to be noticed by the negress, and, as the winter had come, and Louise had no occasion to go out upon the terrace to water her flowers, he carefully remained in the room, keeping even away from the window. After inquiring after the young girl's health, he presently informed her that he had written to the authorities concerning Bernard, and hoped to be able to take her to see him in a few days' time. "Meanwhile," he resumed, "I ought to explain to you what my connection is with Count d'Alcamo, and who I am."

"I only know," said Louise, gravely, "that you saved me and defended and protected my father. I asked to see you again, sir, as I have some secrets to confide to you."

Like all crafty persons, Noridet never understood candour. He always suspected others, no matter who they were, of the same deceit as he himself practised. With regard to Louise he now found himself in the position of an over-skilful general, who construes mistakes in the enemy's tactics as tricks of warfare. He thought that Mademoiselle Bernard was playing a cunning part, and became more circumspect than before. "Excuse me, mademoiselle," said he, "let me, before you acquaint me with anything, at least, tell you my name." He knew very well that by this cautious reply he would increase the young girl's desire to confide in him. Louise Bernard's eyes proved that cunning had naught to do with her impulses. "The name of the man who has protected us," said she, warmly, "can only be that of a true friend, and I don't need to know it to confide in you."

"Let it be so then, mademoiselle," replied Noridet, who wished to tell as few unnecessary falsehoods as possible—"I thank you for your confidence, which I accept because I intend to deserve it."

"You can tell me your name," rejoined Louise, "when I have spoken, so that I may treasure it as I do that of the Count d'Alcamo, my father's benefactor; but I beg you, first of all, to listen to me."

"Speak, my dear child," replied the scoundrel, affecting emotion.

"I have but this means of proving my gratitude. Don't forbid me to believe in you," continued the young girl, with a grace which would have moved any other heart than that of the cold-blooded rascal to whom she spoke. "I told you yesterday that when my father left me to go to the Château of Monville, he spoke of enemies who might murder him."

"Do not indulge in imaginary fears," said Noridet; "the truth is sad enough."

"I know who these enemies are. They really exist," replied Louise, firmly.

Noridet could scarcely prevent his countenance from betraying his fears. Had he been betrayed? He felt so near to ruin that thoughts of a fresh crime already arose in his mind. "You know the enemies of your father, you say?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Yes, and I will tell you the name of the worst one."

Noridet, while he affected to smile again, had a murderous intention in his mind. "But let me first tell you," said Louise, blushing, "that I was about to be married when this misfortune happened to my father."

"We are coming to the truth," thought Noridet.

"It is the man whom I love and whom I was about to marry, who told me our enemy's name, in fact, he stated that the scoundrel who pursues us with his hatred, was his own foster-brother."

"Ah! I knew that Fortoto had betrayed me!" thought Noridet, who had turned pale with rage.

"You see that I cannot be mistaken," added Louise.

There was now an excellent opportunity of finding out what had become of Fortoto. "Indeed!" exclaimed Noridet, with well-assumed indignation, "a man loves you, you love him, and he abandons you at the hour of danger; he was not even there yesterday to watch over you, to spare you the shame of having recourse to a pawn-shop, or to defend you from insult in the streets."

"He was not there, because I had sent him away," replied the young girl, proudly, "and at this moment he is perhaps risking his life for my sake."

"I confess, mademoiselle," replied Noridet, "that your words are enigmas to me, and I must ask you to explain yourself more clearly."

"My betrothed has gone to the Château of Monville," replied Louise, without the slightest hesitation. "I sent him to tell Count d'Alcarno that my father was dying."

All was clear. Noridet understood everything. His heart swelled with the horrible delight of triumphant crime. Like the miner who has brought his works to the base of the very bastion which he wishes to blow up, M. de Mathis's nephew paused to reflect before setting fire to his powder. He was prematurely tasting the delight he would reap from the harm he was about to do. "But your betrothed must have returned?" he said after a moment's silence.

The young girl's brow clouded, and tears came to her eyes. "No, he has not returned," she said, in a voice full of grief.

"He must have written to you?"

"No; and I fear that he also has been killed," said Louise, suppressing her sobs.

"Ah! this is too much sorrow!" cried Noridet, in a tone of the liveliest interest; "and I am ready to do anything to help you out of this frightful uncertainty. To-morrow, this evening, if you like, I will go to Monville, and I promise you—"

"Thanks, sir," interrupted Louise, who was wiping away her tears, "but I have, at this moment, another service to ask of you."

"What is that?" said Noridet, who now had no need to feign surprise.

"My father, before he went away, confided a deposit to me," said the young girl, slowly, "a casket containing important papers which our enemy wishes to get possession of, even at the cost of a crime."

"Have you got it here, in your room?" asked Noridet, who had become very pale.

"I have taken charge of it," replied Louise, proudly, "and though it might cost me my life, I would not let it be taken from me: but I am only a woman, and now that I am alone—"

"Your father will soon be well again, your lover will return," protested Noridet, although he was trembling lest his prey might escape him.

"My father's honour is involved in the safety of this sacred deposit, and I wish to place it in a surer and stronger hand than mine," rejoined Louise, firmly.

"It would be a serious act of imprudence, and you cannot, you ought not, to confide this deposit to any one," exclaimed Noridet, in consternation.

"Not even to you?" asked Louise, in a soft voice.

It seemed incredible. Did Louise Bernard really wish to hand him this box, on which all his hopes and fears had been concentrated for a month past? To secure possession of those papers, he would not have recoiled from a fresh crime, and yet the young girl freely offered to give him the casket. This good fortune was so far beyond his hopes that he could not credit it. "What!" said he, in a voice which trembled in spite of all his efforts to control it. "You wish to make me the guardian of a deposit which your father confided to you, Louise, and to you alone?"

"Yes, because I feel sure that you will take good care of it," said the young girl, quietly.

"That is certain!" exclaimed Noridet. "But have you thought that it is a great, a terrible responsibility for me to take upon myself, and that Monsieur Bernard might be surprised at my having anything to do with the affair."

"When Heaven restores his reason he will approve of what I have done, and if he were here, poor, isolated, and ill as he is, he would ask you to take charge of the deposit."

"However," said M. de Mathis's nephew, with diabolical cunning, "what should I say if anyone came to claim this deposit, producing for instance a letter from Monsieur Bernard, or perhaps from Count d'Alcamo; for, I may now venture to tell you, I feel very uneasy about the count. He has left the Château of Monville, and there is a mystery surrounding him as well as you, which I have not yet been able to penetrate."

"Disappeared! Ah! I understand now why Fortoto doesn't return," murmured Louise, and she lapsed into deep thought, remaining silent.

Noridet, who had succeeded in controlling himself on hearing Fortoto's name, observed her with cruel attention. He enjoyed the effect of his skilfully managed revelation, and he hoped to serve his own purposes by thus disturbing Louise's mind. He thought that the more obstacles she saw before her the more she would wish to rid herself of a deposit which would expose her to the persecution of her father's enemies. In reasoning thus, Noridet had no knowledge of the generous feelings which filled the young girl's heart. "You are right, sir," she resumed at last; "I should reproach myself for having drawn you into the fatal whirlpool now swallowing up all who are near and dear to me, and since there is such great danger I will dare it alone. I will keep the casket."

Noridet could not restrain a nervous gesture. He realised too late that he had gone beyond his aim, and that his perfidious objections had brought about a contrary effect to the one he had expected. "Ah, mademoiselle,"

said he in a grieved tone, "I thought that you understood me better." And as Louise looked at him in surprise, "How could you," he resumed, "take my natural scruples for fear? Do you think me cowardly enough to recoil from a task which you, a young girl, accept?"

"No, no," said Louise Bernard, eagerly, "but I think that you alone can still protect and save my father. You see that your life is worth more than mine."

"Don't let us exaggerate, my dear child," replied Noridet, still striving to maintain his air of affectionate good nature. "There is, I hope, no peril to any one's existence in all this. The only question is whether the casket is safer in my hands than in yours; and when I reflect I see reasons for taking charge of it which did not strike me at first, and which I did not wish to tell you."

"Why did you hide them from me?" said Louise, smiling sadly. "Is there not already mystery enough?"

"It is because this—concerns—your father—" resumed Noridet, with intentional hesitation.

"My father! Oh, pray speak, even though you have to tell me of some new misfortune!"

"Misfortune, no; but there is a danger, perhaps, which must be warded off." The young girl made a gesture of resignation. "Yesterday the commissary of police told me that he had learned, officially, that the Count d'Alcamo had disappeared. The count would seem to have been the victim of a murderer, and proceedings have already begun. You don't know how far the law may carry suspicion. Every one, under circumstances like these, is looked upon with mistrust."

"What do you mean?" asked Louise, anxiously.

"Your father left the château suddenly, on the morning following the count's disappearance, and this unfortunate circumstance—"

"Ah! this is all that was needed to crush me to the earth!" exclaimed Louise. "They suspect my father, the best, the most faithful of men, who would have given his very life for the count!"

"It is absurd," said Noridet, warmly, "and I will undertake to prove that it is so. However, it is owing to that deplorable scene yesterday, and to what your father said about murder and poisoning that this ridiculous suspicion arose."

"But in that case," said Louise, anxiously, "they must have taken him to a prison?"

"Perhaps for one or two days, but the report of the physicians will bring this odious persecution to an end, and I can assure you that Monsieur Bernard will be placed in an asylum where you will be able to see him whenever you wish." The young girl was now sobbing in a heart-rending manner. "However," resumed Noridet, who thought the moment favourable for returning to his object, "I mistrust legal formalities. You haven't been brought into the matter as yet, but you may be summoned to-morrow, and questioned; who can tell? and then a search may be made here."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Louise, indignantly.

"The smallest pretext may suffice to bring that about. Have you thought of what might be the consequence of the discovery of this box, containing secrets of which you do not know the import—secrets which, perhaps, don't belong even to your father?"

"No! no! I won't let the people who persecute an innocent man violate a deposit confided to his honour! Let them come! Let them throw me

into prison if they like, but they shall not find the casket, for you must take it away. I ask it of you in my father's name, and after what you have just told me you cannot refuse."

Noridet, with the serious look of a man who hesitates before making up his mind, replied in a grave manner: "I think, mademoiselle, that it would be very imprudent to keep the casket here, and I will consent to take it with me."

"I thank you, sir," said the young girl with genuine warmth.

"However, my responsibility will be very great, and I must ask you to lighten it as much as possible. I wish you to seal up the casket before confiding it to me. You must, besides," he added, in order to keep up his wicked farce, "write out a statement that you freely and voluntarily confide to me a casket of which you do not know the contents. When you have signed such a paper I shall no longer object, but be ready to take charge of the deposit."

"I will do as you suggest," said the young girl, rising.

"It seems to me," added Noridet, trying to master his delight, "that I have forgotten one important point."

"What is that!"

"To tell you my name, which you have constantly refused to hear."

"You must think that I don't care to know it."

"No, but I might remark, my dear child, that you are not cautious enough. You have confidence in me, and you are right; but I might die. In that case how would you find out where your casket had been placed?"

Sure now of his success, the scamp played with Louise as a tiger with its prey. "Here is my name," said he, taking from his pocket-book a card bearing the inscription—"Ladislav Lugos." And he added: "My address is No. 92 Rue de Londres." This he duly inscribed below the souvenir left him by his formidable enemy, on the occasion of his first visit. It was a refinement of revenge. M. Lugos was dead, and his murderer took a cruel pleasure in availing himself of his name, now that it no longer made him tremble. Louise went quickly towards a piece of old-fashioned furniture in a corner of the little room. It was one of those ebony cabinets inlaid with ivory which date from the Renaissance, and are of Italian make. The young girl opened it, and on the middle shelf Noridet saw the famous casket. He had risen, impelled by curiosity and anxiety, and he followed all the movements of Louise, who, after taking the casket from the cabinet, sat down to write out her statement. Noridet, so anxious to obtain possession of the papers, had merely to stretch out his hand and thus secure both wealth and impunity. The temptation to do so was indeed so strong that in order to rid himself of it, he averted his eyes, and in so doing he observed for the first time on the wall a portrait which he immediately recognised. It was that of Count d'Alcamo, younger by twenty years, and dressed in a naval uniform. Noridet shuddered at sight of the man he had slain, but recovered almost as soon as Don Giovanni, when he saw the statue of the Commander. "The dead don't return," he muttered, with a smile of contempt.

"I have written what you wished, sir," said the young girl, who was now sealing some bands of paper around the casket. "You must now keep your promise and take the deposit with you. I will keep your card and address in case I wish to consult you."

Noridet came forward, endeavouring to remain calm, but his hands

trembled as he held them out to take the casket. Still he was about to grasp it when a loud ring made him stop short.

Louise started, and hastily rose. She instinctively replaced the coffer in the Italian cabinet before Noridet had time to oppose this measure of precaution. "Who can it be?" said he, greatly startled by this ring.

"The doctor, no doubt," said the young girl, after thinking for a moment.

The bell now rang again as violently as before. "Whoever it is, seems to be in a great hurry," said Noridet, who grew more and more disturbed.

"It is strange, indeed," said Mademoiselle Bernard, who looked puzzled.

"Don't open the door," urged Noridet.

Louise hesitated. "But I don't wish to seem to be concealing myself," she said, "when the doorkeeper knows that I am at home."

"Well, I don't wish to be seen here," rejoined Noridet, sharply.

"Go on to the terrace, then, sir," said the young girl, shocked by his imperious tone. "I am going to open the door, but you are not required to show yourself."

There was no reply possible, and Noridet was forced in spite of himself to go out upon the terrace, at the risk of being seen by Aurora, the fortune-teller. However, he drew the glass door towards him, and crouched beneath the fading leaves. Thus hidden, he waited with his heart heavy, and his ears attentive. Whoever the visitor might be, his arrival was most auspicious, and Noridet thought it extremely probable that it was a police agent. He well remembered his conversation with the commissary, and this authoritative ring seemed to him to announce some officer of the law. This he feared above all else, and he saw that he was caught in his own trap if such were indeed the case. The insinuations which he had made on the night before were beginning to bear fruit, and his feigned hesitation when talking with Louise had turned against himself. The lodging was very small, and he distinctly heard the young girl's footsteps as she crossed the front room. The door opened at the third ring, and two cries of delight resounded at one and the same time. "Louise!" "Fortoto!" These words uttered in accents of ineffable joy reached Noridet who stood as if turned to stone. He saw that the skilful structure of cunning he had built up, was about to fall to the ground. After the first moment's stupor, he indeed felt inclined to throw himself upon the lovers and kill them both; but, in broad daylight, and in an inhabited house, such a crime would be madness. It was better to listen and act according to the turn that the conversation might take. He was ignorant of what Fortoto had done since his departure, and a single word might reveal to him a deal that he did not know but had an interest in ascertaining. Besides Louise did not mistrust Noridet, and the first question she asked her lover might bring about revelations which he longed to hear. "You are alive, then!" cried the young girl; "alive! Ah, I feared that you were dead! I have wept ever since you went away."

"But how have you managed to live, Louise, alone, forsaken, without money and with your father ill?" Noridet heard a sob. "What has happened?" added Fortoto, tremulously. "Where is your father? Where is Monsieur Bernard?"

"My father is alive, but there are misfortunes worse than death."

"What do you mean?"

"You will know the truth only too soon," said Louise, in a firmer tone.

"Why didn't you write to me?" she added in a tone of reproach.

"It was impossible. I was in prison; accused of having killed Count d'Alcarno. I only escaped by a miracle."

"Accused! imprisoned! you as well!" exclaimed the young girl, in consternation.

Noridet now realised that he had obtained important information. Fortoto had betrayed the fact that he had escaped from prison. He must, therefore, have an interest in concealing himself, and a fugitive is never greatly to be feared.

"I will explain everything to you," said Fortoto to Louise, "but we have not a moment to lose now. You forbade my coming to see you, and I should never have dared to venture here if the danger were not so pressing."

"Danger! What danger?"

"Yes, a terrible danger: the count's enemy is more than ever to be feared, and you must not remain here a day, an hour longer; you must leave, and the casket which is our safeguard must be placed in a secure spot. The man who once already tried to steal it would not stop at murder in order to wrest it from you," added Fortoto.

The young girl gazed at her lover in mute consternation. "You have kept this casket carefully, have you not, Louise?" asked Fortoto, in a voice quivering with excitement.

Noridet, who had not lost a word, shook in every limb.

"Yes, I have kept it," replied Mademoiselle Bernard, proudly, "but I so well understood the importance of preserving it intact, that I was about to place it in safe hands."

"Oh! it is all right, since you still have it," interrupted Fortoto; "and now, Louise, listen to me, in the name of your father, and in the name of Count d'Alcarno also." Noridet started and his attention increased.

"Swear that you will do what I am about to ask of you."

"I swear it, as I am sure that you would not ask anything that your affianced wife need fear to hear," replied the young girl, gravely.

"I thank you for trusting me," said Fortoto, "and I will now take you to people who will welcome and defend you."

"Explain yourself; my brain is in confusion," murmured Louise in bewilderment.

"You will soon see what I mean. As long as our enemy can follow our track he will pursue us mercilessly until he is master of the coffer. To escape him you must disappear as though you were dead."

"Do you think that I should be safer elsewhere than in this house?" asked the young girl.

"You will not be in safety here, and this is what you must do. You must not take any other lodgings which, like this place, would be discovered. I am now going out alone, and I will wait for you in a vehicle near the Château Rouge. In about half-an-hour's time, take the casket under your shawl, go downstairs and tell the doorkeeper's wife that you are going out for a walk in the neighbourhood. She did not see me when I came in, and will not suspect anything. You must join me; we will go away together, and you will never return here again."

"Listen, Fortoto, I know that you would not deceive me, and I am ready to follow you; but I must tell you that my father has lost his reason, that he has been arrested, and is now under suspicion."

"Under suspicion! But in Heaven's name what crime can be ascribed to him?"

"It is asserted that he left the Château of Monville on the very day of the count's death. He is detained and has been questioned, and who knows whether I myself shall not be accused? When you rang I feared it might be the police."

"And you still hesitate to leave this house—how is that?"

"Those who have nothing to reproach themselves with ought not to abscond. And besides, no matter what may happen, I wish to see my father."

"I promise you upon my honour that you shall see him, and the protection which is now extended over both you and me will shield him also."

Louise remained motionless and did not reply. For the moment she had quite forgotten that Noridet was on the terrace. All at once, however, she remembered it, and in her simplicity she thought of some means of bringing her defender of the evening before into the presence of the new protector whom Heaven had sent her in the person of Fortoto. "I divine all you want to tell me," said her lover, after a pause, "the infernal machinations of that scamp who wished to make a robber of me; I know him now, the monster who has sworn to exterminate us all, that infamous Jules—"

"Do not name him," cried Louise; "don't forget that your own mother brought him up in childhood with you. Besides, we are overheard—"

"By whom?" asked Fortoto, looking about him.

"By a man to whom I yesterday owed my liberty, and perhaps my father's life."

"I must be losing my senses!" cried Fortoto. "A man, you say—there is a man here in your rooms! What is his name? Tell me his name?" he added, carried away by jealous anger.

"He will tell you that himself," calmly replied Louise, opening the glass door, behind which Noridet had been crouching. He was now standing in the middle of the terrace, calm, smiling, his arms crossed, his head erect. Fortoto, as his eyes fell on him, started back in surprise and terror.

"He!" cried the mulatto, "he here!" and he instinctively clutched hold of Louise's arm and attempted to place himself before her.

"What do you mean?" asked Mademoiselle Bernard, greatly alarmed.

"Good day, Fortoto," now said Noridet in a careless tone, coming forward to shake hands with his foster-brother.

Overcome by Jules's unexpected appearance, and stunned by his audacity, Fortoto had not enough presence of mind to draw back his hand, and Noridet took advantage of his utter amazement to try and regain his former power over him. "I thought that I heard your voice and recognised it," he said, quietly; "but I did not expect to see you here. What were you talking about?"

This question, intended to let Fortoto imagine that he, Noridet, had not overheard any of the recent conversation, had a contrary result. "He did not lose a word of what we said," thought Fortoto, "and even if he didn't hear us, the first thing to be done is to get out of his clutches." The mulatto resolved, however, that he would be prudent and avoid an open quarrel. He now believed Noridet capable of anything, even of open violence, and he particularly wished to place Louise in safety. The young girl did not understand what was going on, and she looked from her lover to Noridet as though asking for an explanation. Fortoto, although wishing to avoid violence, also desired to put Louise on her guard. "Mademoiselle," said he, lowering his voice, "this is my foster-brother, Monsieur Jules Noridet, whom you have often heard me speak about."

"Jules Noridet!" repeated Louise, recoiling as though she had beheld a serpent.

"It seems, my dear Fortoto," said Noridet, "that you have often spoken of me, as you say, and not in my praise. I flattered myself that I did this young lady some little service yesterday, and that I was in her good graces, but since you have made your appearance she appears to be afraid of me."

"You forget that you have deceived me, sir," said Louise, gravely.

"In what, pray, mademoiselle?" asked Noridet, without losing his composure. "In telling you that I was Count d'Alcamo's friend? Why, your future husband, Monsieur Fortoto, knows very well that this was perfectly true."

However, Fortoto made a gesture of denial. "I know nothing about all that, sir," replied Louise, firmly, "but I am aware that you presented yourself here under a false name, and my father always told me that no honourable man would do that."

"I truly regret," said Noridet, with a sneer, "that I don't agree with the views of Bernard, the steward, on this delicate point, but I had good reasons for hiding my name under the circumstances."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Louise.

"I thought that I did as well to assume another name in taking the defence of a servant accused of murder, and in protecting his daughter, who was about to be arrested as a thief."

Fortoto's resolution to remain calm did not hold out when he heard these words. "You rascal," he cried, coming forward with his hands clinched.

"Yes! it is true!" said Noridet, without flinching. "Yesterday, at a pawn office, if I had not interfered, mademoiselle would have been taken to a police station, where her honourable father would pretty soon have joined her."

The young girl turned as pale as death, and was obliged to catch hold of her lover's arm for support. "I will explain everything to you," she murmured, leaning against him.

Fortoto gave her a comforting look, and turning to Noridet, and looking him firmly in the face, exclaimed: "You lie!"

"Ah! ha! Master Fortoto," retorted Noridet, "you are somewhat insolent for a jail-bird."

These contemptuous words fell upon the mulatto's ear with startling effect. He realised in an instant all the consequences which would arise from a violent dispute: the intervention of the police, the advantage secured to Noridet by his social position and triumphant calumny. So he withheld the terrible word which rose to his lips to crush Noridet, and hung his head without replying. "I have a mission to fulfil," he thought, "and I have no right to speak before I have fulfilled it."

"Do you know," resumed Noridet, made bolder by this first success, "that if I chose, I could have you taken back to Dieppe, where you would have to give an account of yourself, without speaking of what I have a right to ask of you here and now?"

"I am ready to return the money which I still owe you, the rest of what you gave me to induce me to steal a deposit in the Rue Vanneau," replied Fortoto, whom anger once more carried away.

"Ah! you dare to speak of the part which you played in that affair?" said Noridet, threateningly. "You shall pay dearly for your treachery

and your insolence." The murderer thought that the moment had come for cowing his feeble adversaries.

"Monsieur Jules," replied Fortoto, who had suddenly grown calmer again. "I say nothing, and I will be silent as to what took place between us. What do I desire after all? Only to marry Mademoiselle Bernard, and to have nothing more to do with matters which don't concern me."

Fortoto was playing a part which was the exact reverse of his adversary's, and he pretended to yield in order to get out of his dangerous situation. When he spoke these words in the humblest of tones, he pressed Louise's arm, and the young girl, in amazement, let him proceed without interruption. Noridet looked at them both with curiosity, and seemed to hesitate.

"Be it so," he said, taking a resolve, suddenly. "I will consent to take no further notice of you. You may marry whenever it suits you, and I will even give you some money if you need it." Louise drew herself up, and gave him a contemptuous glance. "Yes," resumed M. de Mathis's nephew in a tone of disdainful superiority, "there shall be a treaty of peace, a final one. I will not meddle with your affairs, if you will not meddle with mine, but on one condition."

"What is it?" asked Fortoto.

"Mademoiselle must give me the coffer which you were formerly ordered to deliver to me."

The two lovers looked at each other, stupefied by this audacity, and a flash of anger darted from their eyes at once and the same time. "You think, then, sir, that I will sell you the sacred deposit which my father intrusted to me?" asked the young girl, coldly.

"You begged of me to accept it just now."

"I then took you for a gentleman. I did not know that you were Jules Noridet."

This time the blow was dealt: Louise's contemptuous words had penetrated the armour of indifference in which the scamp had clad himself. "You refuse, then, to give me that casket?" he said, grinding his teeth with rage.

"When I was alone I would rather have been killed than have given it up," replied the young girl, looking at her lover.

"I wish to have it, and I will have it!" cried Noridet, insane with fury. And rudely thrusting Louise aside, he strode towards the Italian cabinet, in which she had replaced the casket. The key was still in the cabinet door, and Noridet thought that he would possess himself of the deposit by this act of audacity. He had calculated without Fortoto. On seeing Count d'Alcamo's assassin push his affianced wife aside, the mulatto felt his blood rush to his head. With a single bound he threw himself upon his enemy, and caught him by the throat. Noridet tried to resist. He was strong and active, but Fortoto, in practising as a mountebank, had acquired incredible agility, and besides fury tripled the power of his muscles. In the twinkling of an eye, Noridet was overthrown. The mulatto was no longer a man; anger had turned him into a wild beast. He set one knee upon the chest of his adversary, and before Louise had time to prevent it, had dragged him to the edge of the terrace. Then, with a prodigious effort, he raised him in his arms to throw him, head foremost, into the yard below.

"Die like a dog!" he cried, holding Noridet over the railing, which was at a considerable height from the ground.

Noridet, half suffocated, had not uttered a cry. Louise threw herself upon her lover to prevent him from committing this murderous act, but

the struggle had been so rapid, that the young girl's interference came too late. The vanquished man was already raised in Fortoto's arms, even before she had time to clearly understand what her lover was doing. There was a distance of forty feet from the terrace to the yard below, and a fall from this height would necessarily be fatal. Fortoto was about to let go his hold, and dash Noridet into space, when a hoarse cry, which seemed to come from the sky above, fell upon his ear. "Fortoto!" shouted an angry voice, "Fortoto! murderer! rascal! assassin!"

Louise Bernard's lover raised his head, and recoiled as though he had seen an avenging spectre. He had just recognised his mother. The old negress was at her window overlooking the terrace, and was gesticulating in the most threatening manner, pouring forth her creole maledictions as rapidly as possible. Framed by the white window curtains, her black face produced the strangest effect imaginable. She looked like some sibyl. Now, Fortoto had always had great fear of his mother, and when he saw her near him just as he was about to throw Noridet into the yard, he lost his head. He recoiled, let go of his human burden, and sank upon a flower-box, hiding his face in his hands.

"Murderer! murderer!" called Aurora.

Windows were already being opened, and neighbours were asking each other questions from one storey to another. However, it was only Aurora's words that had caused the curiosity, for no one had seen what occurred on the terrace. It was now November; it was cold, and it had required all the negress's noise to induce people to put their heads out of the window. The mountebank rapidly concluded that if he had let Noridet fall, he would inevitably have been arrested on account of the disturbance, which would have brought out every one in the house. The danger was over, however, as Noridet, stretched out beneath the creepers, was beyond the view of the neighbours, and unable to call for help. Still, time was precious, for in a few seconds he would revive. He was already struggling, and his contracted features were assuming a threatening expression. The negress's shouts had ceased; but through the withered leaves Fortoto could still see her making furious gestures and shaking her fist. She had evidently witnessed the whole scene, and had no doubt recognised Jules. Ever since her own son had begun to show affection for Louise, she had thoroughly hated him. Seeing the young girl whom she so cordially detested, on the terrace, and bearing Noridet's condition in mind, she was quite capable of having Fortoto arrested. He perfectly well understood the danger of this, and he wished above everything else to place the girl he loved in safety. "Let us be gone!" he said quickly, to Louise, who stood mute with terror. "Take the casket, and let us leave this accursed house."

"But what will become of this—this wretched man?" asked the young girl, casting a look of pity at Noridet.

"He will revive only too soon, and we have not a moment to lose in making our escape."

"But he heard everything you said, and may follow me to the asylum you have found for me."

"No, Louise, no; he dares not, for he knows that you will there be under the protection of a more powerful man than he is. But, in Heaven's name, let us go!"

Trembling and bewildered, the young girl returned into the room, threw her shawl over her shoulders, snatched up the casket, and then hastily departed with her dusky lover.

XIX.

At the time we write of, the hostelry of the Golden Galleon at Dieppe had nothing in common with the luxurious hotels which stretch along the beach in front of the Casino. Built on the quay near the harbour, at a few steps from the landing-place of the Newhaven packets, it was mainly frequented by travellers going to England by the cheapest route. It was a plain hostelry, in the old style, where bills of fare and extravagant charges for lights and attendance had not yet been introduced, and where the customers willingly warmed themselves at the kitchen fire, while chatting with the landlord. Thus on the morrow of the eventful day, when Noridet's last hope had been extinguished, he could be seen, dressed in a travelling suit, pale, weary, his eyes restless and his brow frowning, walking about the smoky room where the worthy host of the Golden Galleon was superintending the final preparations for the evening meal.

Night was already coming on, and the rain was beating against the windows. The wind was so strong that the ships in the harbour heaved and pitched incessantly, and whenever the door was opened one could hear the creaking of the pulleys and yards of the English packet at anchor, precisely opposite the hostelry. The bell had not yet rung to summon the customers to dinner, and the "horseshoe table" still awaited their presence. A long row of decanters full of bronze tinted eider stretched beside the plates of homely ware. There were a few bottles of wine, around which the more fastidious diners had tied their napkins, to show that they were "private." But the economical Norman drink was mainly patronized as we have already said. Noridet, in this vulgar dining-room, looked like some prince who, having lost his way, had put up perforce at a country inn, however, he seemed quite indifferent to everything around him; he strolled from door to window, looking at the weather, and shrugging his shoulders with ill-disguised impatience. It was easy to guess the cause of his ill-humour. He evidently feared that he might not be able to leave for England, on account of the wind which was becoming tempestuous. Already, that morning the steamboat had not started, and for twelve long hours Noridet had been raging and fuming in this miserable establishment.

After the scene at Louise Bernard's lodgings, he had arranged his affairs like a general preparing to retreat before a victorious enemy. He had removed his money from the bank, and collected his personal property together. He only left behind him the château and estate of Chevreuse, which was of small account in comparison with the fortune which he was taking away in good bank-notes. He contemplated the prospect of exile without any great repugnance. A stay of a few years in free America had nothing terrible about it, for he had the means of living in style, and he believed that in the States the antecedents of a millionaire like himself would never be inquired into. He relied also upon the ever-rising tide of forgetfulness, which, in Paris, sweeps even crime away; and as a first precaution, he was about to start for England.

For many reasons he would have preferred another route, but he had had no choice, and he hoped that he would not be obliged to tarry at Dieppe, as the packet was timed to start on the arrival of the train. The journey had brought back hideous recollections, and had seemed to him a fearfully

long one. However, on arriving at the Dieppe station, he had himself taken straight to the steamer, above which the smoke from the engines was already curling. This time he really thought himself safe. The formality of passports had already been done away with. He had no difficulty in embarking, and he soon strutted triumphantly about the deck of the vessel which to his eyes already represented the free soil of England. No one had observed him. He had merely remarked a passenger on board whom he thought he had previously noticed in the Paris train. "Only a few more moments of anxiety," he reflected. "In another quarter of an hour this fine ship will double the jetty, and my millions will indeed be mine."

Noridet had counted without the northwester. After a quarter of an hour's hesitation, the captain, who saw his barometer fall to the point of discouraging the boldest sailor of the United Kingdom, declared that he could not go out in such weather, and that the departure would be delayed till the evening.

This decision caused Noridet consternation. He would willingly have braved all the typhoons of the Indian Ocean to reach a foreign country as soon as possible. However it was necessary for him to resign himself, disembark, and wait until the gale was over. To avoid all chance of unpleasant meetings, he chose the tavern of the Golden Galleon, which was merely separated from the boat by the quay, and where the customers were not likely to know him. He took a room, and lying down on the bed, he managed to sleep feverishly until four o'clock. He learned on awakening a most disagreeable piece of news. The tempest had not abated, and the boat's departure was now put off till the morning.

Seeing himself pent up, perhaps for several days, in this hostelry, which he did not even dare to leave, Noridet had a perfect fit of rage. As an additional annoyance, the waiter refused to bring his meals to his room. The customs of the house were opposed to it, and as he was dying of hunger, he was forced to proceed to the common table. Thus it is easy to understand that when dinner was announced he was in anything but an amiable frame of mind. He hastily sat down in order to finish the sooner. The guests came in one after another, talking loudly, their faces red with the repeated potations with which they had occupied this wet day of waiting. Noridet did not even deign to look at them, however, but waited for the end of the repast to free him from their unpleasant society.

All at once, however, he heard the innkeeper usher a late arrival into the room, and exclaim: "This way, sir," as he pointed out a seat at the table.

Noridet mechanically raised his eyes, and his surprise was such that he almost fell from his seat. In the individual who now sat down in front of him, he recognised his foster-brother Fortoto. The latter took his seat with the ease of a man accustomed to dine at a table in company. He bowed politely to his neighbours, and quietly unfolded his napkin, while he looked pleasantly around him. He was dressed almost elegantly, and completely transformed. Indeed, the ex-super of the *Fantaisies Comiques*, the ex-dealer in Bengal powder, now looked like a respectable member of society. His demeanour, manners, and gestures, had something open and modest about them, which was fairly calculated to surprise Noridet. He was still more surprised when he saw Fortoto glance at him with perfect indifference. It was almost enough to make one believe that Aurora's son had a twin brother, or a double.

Noridet was greatly troubled by this. He succeeded in hiding his

emotion, but his heart beat so fast that it seemed as though it would leap from his breast, and the blood rushed to his brain so hotly as to disturb his usually lucid mind. He could not understand what was going on. He did not try to ask himself how it was that Fortoto ventured to re-appear in a town where he had been imprisoned a fortnight previously, and he could not guess why he failed to recognise him. He foresaw misfortune, that was all.

The meal began, and there was immediately a clatter of plates, and jingle of glasses, which, added to the locomotion of the busy servants, would have sufficed to divert the thoughts of the most obstinate dreamer. This din served as an accompaniment to the conversation which, as soon as the soup was served, began around the table. Under all other circumstances Noridet would have been put to flight by the deafening uproar, and by the vulgar behaviour of the diners. But, in the serious situation in which he found himself, their conversation did not displease him. It admitted of his remaining silent, observing, and leaving the table unremarked.

His neighbours were two very corpulent men, between whom his slender figure almost entirely disappeared, and who exchanged remarks, which were as stupid as they were noisy. "I, sir, am from the north east," said the man on Noridet's right, "and I can certify that Strasbourg beer is a better drink than cider."

"Ah, but England, that's the place for beer!" rejoined the man on the left.

"I say, Mouscadet," called out a tall fellow, adorned with a variety of imitation jewellery, "you know that if you mention England more than three times before dinner is over you must pay a fine in champagne."

"I am a Norman, now," said a red-faced little man, "and I am very fond of cider, but I prefer rum, especially when it comes direct from that gentleman's country," and thereupon he pointed at Fortoto.

Indeed, Fortoto had begun to take part in the general conversation, and seemed to be playing the part of a planter from the West Indies. Noridet was struck by his language and manner. He was evidently acting in this way intentionally. But what was his aim? This the murderer could not guess. Fortoto might have had him arrested with very little trouble, and if he was now trying some artifice, it must be because he had deeper plans.

The conversation turned upon the comparative merits of all the liquids known under the sun, with the one exception of water, for which beverage the people present appeared to have no liking whatever. At last, however, the talk changed, and the weather became the topic, the diners chatting about the probabilities in favour of the departure of the packet. The gentleman from the north-east alone continued to uphold the advantages of drinking Strasbourg beer, while the others prated about tides, currents, and the influence of the moon, all of which appeared to interest Fortoto. "Do you think, sir," said he to the peony-coloured Norman, "that the packet will be able to leave to-night?"

"I should say not," replied the fat man, "but as the captain is a gallant fellow, it might."

This thoroughly Norman reply was not of a nature to commit its author, or to throw much light upon the question, but everybody ended by giving an opinion, and the majority agreed that departure would be impossible that evening, and even unlikely on the morrow. Noridet, in spite of the scornful impassibility which he had assumed, could not hide the fact that the subject interested him, and he even ventured to ask a few questions.

This imprudence on his part brought him, from his neighbour on the right, a discourse anent the inconvenience of storms as regards the wine business. "Sir," said the fat man, gravely, "the sea is very injurious to commerce. With the sea a person can never make sure, but in my part of the country, we fortunately have the railroad. I must tell you that I am not from Normandy. I am from—"

"The north-east," interrupted Noridet, with perfect gravity.

"You have guessed it! Ah! it's easy enough to see that, and, besides, you may have seen me this summer when I 'did' Brittany. But what line are you travelling in?"

Noridet, who did not understand this choice language, thought that it was some impertinent joke, and looked angrily at his neighbour. "Yes, what kind of stuff? I'll bet that it's wholesale grocery."

Noridet needed all his self command not to box his neighbour's ears, for the fat man had, unawares, made an allusion to the business carried on by Jules's deceased father. Making a violent effort to restrain himself, the offended millionaire replied: "I am not in business."

"You are very lucky, then. You are going to London for pleasure, I suppose?"

"For pleasure; yes, for pleasure," replied Noridet, with a smile that was more like a grimace.

"I beg your pardon, sir," now remarked Fortoto, taking part in the conversation, "do you intend to stay long in London?"

"How does that concern you?" rejoined Noridet, enraged by the mulatto's audacity.

"I beg your pardon," said Aurora's son, "but I thought that I might, perhaps, be useful to you."

"Thank you; I do not require a man-servant," replied Noridet, in a most aggressive tone.

This reply, made so unceremoniously in the midst of the general conversation, drew all eyes upon M. de Mathis's nephew, and he already regretted having made it. He had every interest in not being noticed, and it annoyed him very much to be stared at by everybody at the table, and this time, recognised as a man belonging to a different social sphere to their own. However, he *had* spoken, and it was necessary to put a good face on the matter. The dessert finally put an end to the scene, and Noridet rose and left the room. On going out he found that the fires of the packet had been extinguished, although the wind had fallen. At all events, the vessel would not leave that night. Entering the hotel again he ran against Fortoto in the hall; and at once his anger got the better of his prudence. "Ah! here you are, you scamp!" said he, between his teeth.

"At your orders, Monsieur Noridet," replied Fortoto quietly.

"Hum! I have a word or two to say to you. Will you take a turn with me?"

"Willingly," replied Fortoto, following his foster-brother to the quay.

"I have him in my power at last," now thought the murderer, and he indulged in a grim smile.

Fortoto now walked quietly along beside him, Noridet rapidly taking his way towards the harbour. Great waves were still dashing in. The pier and the sea were having a fierce battle together, and in the cloudy weather the lighthouse shed but a faint light around. Noridet at last seated himself on a stone bench, the usual resting-place of the Dieppe loungers when gazing at the ships, and Fortoto placed himself beside him

without departing from his deferential manner, but without showing any signs of fear. After a silence Noridet made up his mind to speak. "Why are you following me?" he asked, in a harsh tone.

"I am not following you, Monsieur Jules, it is you who asked me to come for a turn with you."

"Well, why have you come to Dieppe when I am here?"

"Because I was ordered to do so."

"By those in whose service you now are, I suppose?"

"I am in no one's service, Monsieur Jules; but I love those who protect Louise, and I obey them."

"You confess, then, that you have been sent here to spy upon me by the scamps to whom you have sold yourself?"

"I haven't sold myself to any one, Monsieur Jules. I am simply paying a debt of gratitude."

"That is to say that by betraying me you are earning the marriage portion of that Bernard girl." Fortoto made no reply to this, and Noridet, who had relied on the effect of an insult to rouse him and make him abandon his reticence, savagely bit his lips. "Do you know," said he, trying another method, "that I have the right to revenge myself upon a traitor, and have two ways of doing so, if I choose?" Fortoto made a gesture of indifference. "In the first place, I should merely have a word to say to the first policeman that appears, for you to be sent back to the prison which you escaped from a short time ago."

"I do not fear that from *you*," replied Fortoto, in a significant tone.

"Perhaps not, but you may fear being killed like a dog, and thrown to the fishes," cried Noridet, rising and fumbling in his pocket.

"Pray don't speak so loud, Monsieur Jules," replied Fortoto, who had not even stirred. "The keeper of the watch-house is over there, and he might overhear you."

This unexpected composure had an effect similar to that of a cold shower-bath upon Noridet. He seemed to gasp with inward rage. "For Fortoto to be so calm," thought he, "he must know that he is strongly supported." Meanwhile the ex-mountebank remained motionless and silent. "If you will come back to my service," said Noridet, "I will give you more money than those whom you are now serving."

"But I am not working against you, Monsieur Jules," said Fortoto.

The mulatto's voice was so mild that Noridet was deceived. He thought that he had succeeded in exciting his foster-brother's cupidity, and made haste to speak to the purpose. "Listen," said he in an agitated tone. "I at one time proposed to you to give you ten thousand francs for the casket. Well, I will give you a hundred thousand if you will tell me all you know."

"I know but little," sighed Fortoto, who appeared more and more inclined to speak.

"You know enough to earn that amount."

"Question me then."

"In the first place, what orders have you received? What were you told to do before coming here?"

"One thing only, to prevent you from leaving France. I have a letter which I am to give to the of police if you set foot on the English packet."

"Why, then, didn't you have me stopped when I went on board this morning?"

"Because I knew that the packet wouldn't start."

"Well, what if I don't attempt to go away?"

"In that ease I'm not to do anything. I'm to follow you, that's all."

"Then if I do not attempt to leave France, I have nothing to fear."

"Nothing. My orders are precise."

"It is the same old plan as that infernal Lugos devised," thought Noridet. "All right, those who are having me followed shall come to the same end that he has. Well," he added, aloud, "I give up the idea of starting. Are you lodging at the Golden Gallcon?" Fortoto replied by an affirmative nod. "Then come and see me to-morrow in my room," rejoined Noridet. "I have a deal to say to you, and this is a bad place for a chat. Let us go indoors now and walk ahead," added the scamp, rising.

The ex-mountebank obeyed without a word and walked along the jetty. Noridet followed three paces in the rear, and carrying, concealed in his right hand, a short dagger, the sharp point of which would kill a man at a single stab. Fortoto walked on without apparent mistrust. The raging sea was near at hand to bear his corpse away. Before striking, however, Noridet turned towards the lighthouse to see if he was watched. As he did so a man who had undoubtedly been hidden behind the tower came forth from amid the darkness, and his figure was distinctly defined in the luminous zone which the lighthouse threw upon the jetty. Noridet prudently replaced his dagger in his pocket. He longed to rid himself of Fortoto, but he greatly feared fresh difficulties, such as rendering himself liable to punishment by committing an imprudent murder in presence of this inconvenient witness. Accordingly he continued following Fortoto.

When he had gone some paces he turned again, and saw that the strange witness was coming in the same direction. This was alarming, but, after all, this man might simply be returning into the town, and Noridet resolved to walk more slowly and let him pass ahead. After some minutes, however, he perceived that this individual still kept at the same distance. He must have regulated his pace by Noridet's who now stopped, whereupon the stranger stopped as well. This persistence was so strange that Noridet resolved to be cautious. The mulatto did not seem to have noticed that they were followed, but talked to Noridet, whom he was near, with the utmost coolness. The night was too dark to distinguish the attire of the singular follower, and Noridet was obliged to resort to the most hazardous conjectures. Was this man mounting guard over Fortoto, and had he been secretly hired to do so, to protect him? Or was he some eccentric person who had merely walked out to see the effect of the wind on the waves, and was amusing himself by following Noridet and his companion? In the latter case the conversation had perhaps been overhead, and Noridet feared that it might be brought up against him. However, he realised that the time and place were not fitted for demanding an explanation, and he went on grumbling toward the hostelry. He resolved to delay ridding himself of Fortoto till a more favourable opportunity, and began to talk with him. The mulatto's replies led Noridet to believe that he had candidly told him the extent of the orders which he had received. It was evident that he would be prevented from leaving France, but not denounced. He now concluded that M. Lugos must have inclosed his instructions with the will in the famous casket. This was incomprehensible, however, and Noridet resolved to find out what plot was being woven around him even though the discovery cost him another crime. They speedily reached the moorings of the packet boat. The stranger still followed. As Noridet wished to see what would happen if he dismissed Fortoto, he bade his foster-brother good-night, telling him to come to his room on the morrow.

The mulatto readily promised to do so and returned into the hostelry without looking back.

As soon as he had disappeared, Noridet retraced his steps, and walked straight up to the mysterious personage who had been following him. The fellow saw him come up but did not stir. He was quietly seated upon an old cannon, and awaited Noridet with his arms crossed. The young millionaire, surprised at so much persistence and coolness, walked on with a certain amount of distrust. He asked himself if this obstinate pursuit was simply to watch him, or whether a trap had been laid for him. It might be that this fellow had been told to draw him to some ambush of the police. However, after a moment's hesitation, Noridet thought that it was wisest to try and fathom the mystery. He was in one of those trying situations in which all depends upon daring. Besides, the poniard destined for Fortoto might rid him of another spy. So he contented himself with placing his hand upon the weapon, which was concealed in his pocket, and then resolutely approached the stranger. The only lamp on the quay cast but a feeble glimmer over this individual who still sat upon the broken cannon. He was dressed like a seaman with sea-boots, a pilot coat and cloak. His face, so far as it could be seen under the raised hood of the latter garment, appeared young, and his eyes were very brilliant. "Why did you follow me just now?" said Noridet, abruptly, after a short inspection of the stranger's person.

"Because I wish to speak to you," replied the stranger, quietly.

"What have you to say to me?" said Noridet, surprised at this reply.

"You wish to go to England, don't you?"

"How do you know that?" asked Noridet, all his mistrust reviving.

"You said so to your friend, on the jetty."

"Ah, indeed! It seems that you listened."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders and said with composure: "I am not a police agent, I am a seaman. I was near the lighthouse and the wind carried your talk that way."

"In what way, pray, can my conversation have interested you?"

"Well, if you wish to leave to-night I can help you to do so."

"But you haven't the means, I presume, of making the packet leave in spite of the wind and the waves?"

"No, but I know of a neat-decked bark which will take you over to Brighton in twelve hours' time, and which can slip her moorings at daylight. I have just been looking at the weather from the jetty. The nor'-wester will fall when the tide is in."

There was a pause, for Noridet made no haste to reply. He was looking at the stranger who appeared so obliging, and mistrusted him more and more. "Well," said he, with a careless air, "if the wind falls the English packet will start as well, and I have taken my passage on board."

"Let us say no more about it, then," said the seaman, indifferently. "I thought that you did not care to go by the packet."

"Why not, if you please?"

"Oh, your affairs don't concern me; but I have often seen persons who had reasons for slipping away from a place, and I have taken more than one across without the permission of the authorities. I try to do the best I can for my own pocket, and the rest does not concern me."

"What is your calling, pray?"

"Smuggling, if you must know; but I don't know of any goods that pay as well as a passenger who wants to throw the police off his track. I

thought that this might be your ease. I am mistaken it seems, but there was no offence meant, and I must look out for another customer."

With this conclusion the seaman got up and began to walk along the quay with the rolling gait peculiar to sailors. He had not gone far, however, when Noridet called out to him: "Another word with you."

"Oh! I'll talk as long as you like."

"Well, supposing I profit by your boat, where is it?"

"Oh! she is moored three leagues from here, at a point where there are no coastguards or police officers."

"It is of no use, then. I wish to go aboard before daylight."

"Well, I have a brother who keeps an inn at Le Pollet down there on the other side of the docks. He has a horse and a trap which can take us to the creek in an hour and a-half. When the sun is up to-morrow morning we sha'n't be in sight of land."

Noridet was still reflecting. "How much do you want for taking me over to England?" he asked, abruptly.

"Three thousand francs, that is my price," replied the seaman, unhesitatingly; "half before sailing, the rest on the quay at Brighton."

"The packet only costs thirty francs, first-class," said Noridet, pretending to bargain.

"That's so, but I start when I please, and I get to England all the same, though the other boat may go faster."

"How many are you aboard?"

"There is a young hand and a boy."

"Very well," said Noridet; "wait for me in an hour's time at the end of the dock-bridge, near Le Pollet."

"It's agreed. I'll be there," rejoined the seaman, quietly.

XX.

NORIDET, leaving the smuggler with whom he had made this appointment, quietly returned to the hotel like a traveller who had just been smoking a cigar on the jetty. He had an hour before him which he meant to employ in ascertaining whether Fortoto had spoken in good faith. The mulatto had left him declaring that he was going to bed, and Noridet wished to hear what was being said by the guests around the kitchen fire, in order to see if this would give him any hint as to what he wanted to learn. There were several people seated in front of the hearth, and a cloud of tobacco smoke filled the room. The landlord at once asked Noridet if he would like to come near to the fire, and the young millionaire replied, that, as he was "as wet as any duck," he would gladly do so. He wished to appear familiar and easy, and remarked that he had gone out to see if there were a chance of the weather changing, and of the steamer leaving on the morrow.

"Hum! there's a nor'wester on deuced sharp, sir," said the landlord, "and at this season squalls often last all the week through." In point of fact, the landlord had never even doubled the port, but, like a true native of Dieppe, he thought himself called upon to talk like some old tar.

"Well, people must submit to such things," said Noridet, philosophically, holding up his feet to dry the soles of his boots at the fire. "I shall wait, as I cannot do otherwise."

"Besides," resumed the host, delighted at the prospect of retaining a customer who had drunk Saint Julien at dinner, "we have plenty of

curiosities here and amusements too. We have the Château d'Arques near by, and in the town there is Duquesne's statue worth seeing, and Ango—"

"Oh I have been in Dieppe before," interrupted Noridet.

"And if you like to go to the play sir," resumed the innkeeper, who, once started, could never stop, "there is a very good company here just now. The manager has engaged Monsieur Alcindor, the head baritone of the great theatre at Rouen, of whom you must have heard."

"Thank you, I am somewhat fatigued," said Noridet, absently.

"You would like to be off, like myself, sir," now said a suspicious-looking man with greyish hair. "These steamers have upset everything. Formerly, you see, when a man of business was in a hurry he used to make his price with a 'coaster,' and off he went. You could find no end of them along-shore, and they could have taken a man to America, for aught I know to the contrary."

On hearing this, Noridet felt his last suspicion of the seaman depart.

"It would be harder to find one now, though," said the same speaker.

"There are a few smugglers, but they make you pay frightfully stiff, I can tell you, for taking you over—perhaps a hundred times as much as the fare on the steamer."

"I should think then that the luxury of such a trip must be confined to cashiers making off with their employers' cash-boxes," said Noridet, coolly.

"You are right, sir," chimed in the host; "only a month ago we had a chap here from Paris who was running off with a heap of money. There had been a telegraphic message, but the commissary, when he came to catch him on board the steamer, found that he had gone off in a smuggler's sloop. He embarked at the crab-creek not far from Tréport."

It was not possible for Noridet to suppose that there was any connivance between the sailor and mine host of the 'Golden Galleon.' So satisfied by what he had heard, he now asked what room was occupied by Fortoto.

"Number eighteen, first floor, over the yard. But he must be in bed, for he has been indoors for a long time," replied the host, who remembering that unpleasant remarks had been exchanged between the pair, felt afraid that they might think of fighting a duel.

"Oh, no matter, then—I only wanted a little information from him, and I can ask him for it to-morrow morning. Good evening, gentlemen," added Noridet, going quietly out of the room.

Once in the hall, he took his candle and his key like a peaceful traveller preparing to retire to rest, and went, indeed, to his own room; however, almost immediately afterwards he left it, and proceeded stealthily towards the apartment occupied by Fortoto.

The room bearing the number "eighteen" communicated with an open gallery running round the yard, according to an architectural system peculiar to Norman inns. Inside the glass door of the room there hung a muslin curtain, so that the interior of the apartment could easily be inspected as it was lighted up. Noridet saw that the mulatto was in bed, and reading a letter by the light of a candle. A man so quietly engaged could not be thinking of devoting his night to playing the spy. Besides, as though he had wished to settle the question, Fortoto speedily placed the letter under his pillow and blew out his light. "Aurora's son isn't able to contend with me," said Noridet to himself, "and while he is dreaming of Louise Bernard I shall be sailing for the English coast."

As he said this he quietly slipped down the stairs, left the inn without

meeting any one, and consulted his watch by the light of the lamp on the quay. "It's time to start," he muttered; "my man must be waiting."

He then walked hastily to the dock bridge, reflecting that, as matters now stood, his foster-brother was the sole agent of the people who possessed his secret. That being the case, and Fortoto being asleep in bed, there was nothing to prevent him, Noridet, from escaping that night to England. Having arrived at this conclusion, he walked along more lightly and speedily reached the bridge at the end of which he expected to find the seaman.

"Is it you?" said someone in a whisper as he came up, and on Noridet giving an affirmative reply the smuggler stepped out of the gloom around. "There is a conveyance a hundred yards from here," said he, "near my brother's tavern. I shall go ahead. Follow me at a distance, so that the custom-house fellows may not see us." And without prolonging the conversation he walked on towards the suburb of Le Pollet.

His precautions seemed so natural that Noridet congratulated himself on having found so apt and prudent a guide. "He understands his business," thought he, "and I am sure of smoking my cigar to-morrow in England."

A moment later he reached a low building above the door of which there hung a flaring lantern. Hard by stood a gig with large wheels and with a hood, which was lowered. Noridet looked round him for the driver, and at that moment he heard himself called from inside the vehicle, "Get in; we have no time to lose."

He obeyed, and saw that the driver was the seaman, who had donned a blue frock and a cap, by way of disguise. Scarcely had Noridet taken his seat when his companion whipped up the horse, and in less than three minutes the vehicle was speeding along the road which leads from Dieppe to Le Tréport. Whilst in the town Noridet kept silent like the driver, but when he realised that there was no one to overhear him, he said: "You were punctual, my good fellow, and I think a deal of that."

He expected to be thanked, but there was no reply. So he thought it time to touch upon a more important matter. "It seems to me," said he, "that in accordance with our arrangements, I ought to hand you half of three thousand francs now."

"Oh! there'll be time enough for that at the creek," said the smuggler, drily.

"As you like," replied Noridet, surprised. "Shall we soon be there?"

"In an hour and a half, I fancy."

"Your horse must be a good one then; for, if I am not mistaken, we are going near to Le Tréport."

"Oh! not nearly so far," replied the sailor, curtly.

"Near Biville, then; as far as I can recollect, the coast on that side offers convenient anchorage for your calling."

"My calling!" replied the smuggler. "I can carry that on anywhere."

There came another somewhat long pause. Without having any serious suspicion, Noridet felt annoyed at this coldness and reserve, to which he was not accustomed on the part of persons of inferior rank to his own. However, he firmly remarked with cleverly assumed indifference, "If I'm not mistaken, the Château of Monville, where Baron Brossin lives, must be in this direction. Do you know it?"

As these words fell from his lips he thought that the driver started; however, the fellow's only answer was, "I never leave Dieppe, and I don't know anyone about here." With which he smartly whipped up his horse.

"Seamen are not talkers, it appears," thought Noridet to himself; and he concluded that if the fellow knew how to guide his boat, his taciturnity did not matter.

"In two hours' time we shall be out at sea," he said to himself, lighting a cigar, "and I must be mad to trouble myself about this man's manners. Do you smoke?" he asked aloud.

"No," curtly replied the seaman, and after this he did not open his mouth. The horse went ahead with surprising rapidity, and Noridet could not remember ever having found one of such good speed. Such a pace seemed strange on the part of an innkeeper's hack, but Noridet was so anxious to reach the sea, that he did not think of the matter. After an hour's fast trotting along the highway, the horse was turned into a cross-road and went on still at the same rapid rate for twenty minutes or so, when at last the loud voice of the sea was heard. "We are arriving, I believe," said Noridet.

"Yes, we shall be there in another quarter of an hour," replied the smuggler, whipping up his horse.

The wheels of the vehicle now rolled over some fine dry grass, such as borders a cliff, and Noridet, at last, thought that he saw a black mass before him, dimly outlined against the sky. Suddenly, and before he had time to question his driver, the vehicle stopped short. "We have arrived," said the seaman curtly.

"Arrived!" repeated Noridet; "this is some joke, I suppose?"

"I have not the least inclination to joke," replied the smuggler coldly.

"Where are we then, pray?" asked Noridet. "I hear the sea, no doubt, but I can't see it, and I presume that you do not wish me to take this deserted spot for the crab-creek?"

"Do you suppose," said the fellow, shrugging his shoulders, "that I embark my brother's trap and horse, when I go over to England?"

"Be good enough to tell me, then, what house this is?" said Noridet, still haughtily.

"Oh! an old place which serves me as a coach-house and a stable. Instead of getting angry, you would do better to help me unload the vehicle for the tide will soon run out, and we have no time to lose, if we wish to take advantage of it."

This explanation was so boldly given, that it entirely quieted the doubts which had arisen in Noridet's mind. "You are right, my good fellow," said he, alighting, "let us make haste. Your comrades are, probably, waiting for you upon the beach."

"Yes," replied the seaman, laconically.

When Noridet set foot upon the ground, he looked about him. The aspect of the country around was very gloomy, and in front of the conveyance rose a lofty ruin. On the right, on the left, and behind, there grew some dry furze. Beyond, the noise of the sea showed that the shore was near. This appearance of things somewhat surprised Noridet, but he reasoned that a smuggler could not choose his spot for putting off. The great point was to get away as soon as possible, and the smuggler seemed to be hastening his preparations. He had already drawn from the coach-box a peculiar oblong chest, which Noridet looked at with curiosity. "Shall I help you to unharness the horse?" he asked.

"No need," replied the seaman, who was now tying the reins to a ring fastened to the wall. "Now, sir," he added, "please follow me."

"Willingly. But are you going to leave the horse and trap here?"

"They will be fetched all right. Let us go."

"Where, if you please?"

"You shall see."

The seaman, having taken the strange oblong box on his back, turned the corner of the wall, and Noridet followed him without remark. The building, near which they had stopped, seemed to be some forsaken abode, and the young millionaire, whose thoughts were clear, fancied that it looked like a custom-house or coastguard station. This seemed to him an odd choice on the part of a smuggler, but he had not time to pause upon the threshold. "Here we are," said the seaman, bending down so as to enter a low door.

Noridet had now gone too far to draw back, and did not hesitate to follow him. The place in which he found himself did not look like a store-house. It was a large vaulted room, feebly lit by a single window without panes, but having an iron grating outside. The stranger had deposited his box in one corner, and appeared occupied in removing its contents. "We are losing precious time, it seems to me," said M. de Mathis's nephew.

"I have finished," rejoined the seaman in a low tone, and at the same time he walked quickly towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Noridet, imperiously.

The stranger showed no haste to reply, and Noridet, who was observing his movements, saw, with surprise, that he had so placed himself as to completely bar the only exit from the room. He held a long object, which looked like a staff, under his arm, and seemed to be performing some complicated operation. Noridet, surprised at first, gradually passed from astonishment to uneasiness. The smuggler's conduct seemed to him so unaccountable that the idea crossed his mind that the fellow must be a madman. Suddenly, however, a brilliant light burst upon the hall, and Noridet recoiled with a cry of surprise. The seaman had lit a torch secured to the wall, and which illuminated the whole room with its clear blaze. In his hand, moreover, the stranger held two naked swords. The hood of his cloak was thrown back upon his shoulders, and for the first time Noridet saw the features of his mysterious guide. He was a very young man, and with his long yellow hair he did not at all look like a sailor. He was slender, and even seemed delicate. But he certainly possessed a deal of agility, and a close observer would have seen that his seemingly frail appearance concealed unusual vigour and energy. His large blue eyes, which were extremely bright, gave a fierce expression to his almost girlish face. Noridet felt sure that he had never seen him before, and was more than ever convinced that he had to deal with a madman. "What is the meaning of this preposterous farce?" he asked, scornfully.

"What you call a farce," replied the young stranger, "is vengeance."

"Vengeance, my dear fellow! You must be out of your mind. I want to pay you to take me to England, and not to act an absurd comedy."

"You want to pay me," said the young man, "with the gold you stole from Mademoiselle Andrée, eh?"

This name fell upon Noridet like a thunderbolt. "Andrée!" he stammered. "What nonsense is this?"

"Yes, Andrée de Salazie, the young girl whose fortune you are taking away in the pocket-book which you have about you."

"Ah! ah!" resumed Noridet, who thought that he understood the situation; "it seems that smuggling does not suffice for you, and so you rob people with premeditation, and by entrapping them."

"A highway robber isn't as vile as a poisoner," said the stranger with contempt; "but be easy, Monsieur Jules Noridet; it is your life I want, and not your money."

"What is it you have the audacity to say, you scoundrel?" demanded Noridet, pale with rage and fear.

"I say that you poisoned your uncle, Monsieur de Mathis, and robbed his adopted daughter of a fortune which lawfully belonged to her."

"You lie!" shouted Noridet, grinding his teeth with fury.

"The proofs of your crime are in the hands of a man who might bring you to the scaffold to-morrow if I had not received the mission to punish you," said the young fellow, coldly.

"Another agent of that rascal Lugos!" muttered Noridet in despair.

"I say," continued the spurious seaman, "that you basely murdered Count d'Alcamo at night-time, on the cliffs, at the end of the grounds of the Château of Monville."

"It is false! there are no proofs!" cried Noridet in a choking voice.

"Proofs! I witnessed the deed with my own eyes, and these swords are the same ones which you brought when you went to meet your victim."

"The man of the ruins!" cried Noridet. He had turned quite livid.

"I also say that you attacked an old man who was sleeping defenceless beside you, and who knew your secrets, and that, to make sure of his death, you threw him headlong out of a railway train."

"You lie! the man of whom you speak is insane."

"He is not insane, and he has spoken. You see that I know everything."

There came a pause. An idea had struck Noridet despite his terror; it was that this unknown avenger must have a motive, and of all things he must find out what it was. "The rascal wishes to share the plunder," he said to himself, and with his base soul he already thought of proposing a bargain. "What do you want of me?" he asked at last.

"I want to kill you."

"To kill me!" sneered Noridet. "Herc, now, without my resisting?"

"You perhaps prefer to be handed up to the officers of the law, who are sometimes at fault, and do not always punish. Well, no, I don't care to be the executioner's purveyor, and that is why I wish to fight with you. Here is a sword. Defend yourself?"

And thereupon the spurious smuggler threw down one of the weapons he held, but Noridet did not pick it up.

"Excuse me, master scamp," he said, again becoming haughty, "I have borne your clownish insults, but I shall not do you the honour to accept you as an adversary. If you wish to get rid of me you must murder me."

He then crossed his arms and waited. The stranger hesitated for an instant, and then coldly resumed: "So be it. I will kill you. It won't be a murder, it will be an execution." And, placing his sword under his left arm, he drew a pistol from his belt, made ready, and slowly raised the weapon to Noridet's face. "If in one minute you are not on guard, I will blow out your brains as if you were a dog."

Noridet suffered a few seconds to pass without stirring. The muscles of his face contracted, however, and white foam gathered on his lips. He became hideous to behold. "To die like this!" he muttered, "no, no! I can fence better than he. I will kill him!"

He took up the sword at the very moment when the stranger was about to pull the trigger of his pistol. "That is right," said the young fellow

coolly replacing his pistol in his belt. "I am ready." And he was instantly on guard.

"I do you the honour to fight with you," said Noridet, crossing blades with him, "but I hope you will tell me your name. Since you seem sure of sending me to another world you ought to give me that satisfaction."

"My name is Jean," replied the stranger.

"Jean—is that all?" asked Noridet, trying an extrication which was parried, "that is hardly a name."

"It is mine," was the reply.

"And this mysterious den is your private residence?"

"Yes, we are near the cave where you dishonoured the daughter of your friend, Baron Brossin."

This sarcasm drew a cry of fury from Noridet. The scoundrel was a good fencer, and thought that he should soon conquer his adversary. After a few rapid feints he grew warmer in his attack, and tried several thrusts at his adversary. But the young fellow parried them with the utmost ease. It was evident that he was a skilful swordsman; and Noridet, accordingly, had recourse to all his science. But his adversary's wrist seemed of iron, and after a lengthy struggle he had lost naught of his coolness and agility. He kept himself upon the defensive, seldom giving a thrust, but never retreating. It was evident that he was trying to exhaust Noridet, who changed his tactics. He realised that his antagonist fenced as well as he did, and he now thought of trying trickery. If he could only compel him to change his position and uncover the open doorway, before which he now stood, he, Noridet, might be able to bound outside and escape amid the darkness. Such, at least, was the murderer's plan. By springing on one side he succeeded in making his adversary change his position slightly, and for a moment he thought that his plan might succeed. This hope was transient, however. The young fellow, as though he had expected this attempt, now began a vigorous attack.

Rapid extrications, feints, and thrusts, followed one upon another, and Noridet began to retreat, and his enemy charged so fiercely that he soon had to recoil to the wall. After two minutes more of desperate fighting, Noridet's weary arm could scarcely hold his sword, and his limbs trembled beneath him. He made a despairing effort, and threw himself blindly upon his opponent, but his sword slipped, and Jean's avenging steel pierced him in the breast. For an instant the scoundrel remained standing close to the wall, against which he pressed convulsively with the hilt of his sword. Then he fell on to the flagstones, and blood spouted from his mouth.

"Die, wretch!" cried the spurious smuggler, who raised his sword to pin him to the pavement, and he was about to strike when the wall, as it were, suddenly opened.

A man appeared upon the threshold of a narrow passage, disclosed by a revolving block of granite. "The count!" cried the young fellow. "Ah, let me dispatch your murderer!"

"Not yet, Jean de Monville," said M. d'Alcarno, restraining his arm. "This scoundrel must live. I reserve him for another vengeance!"

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